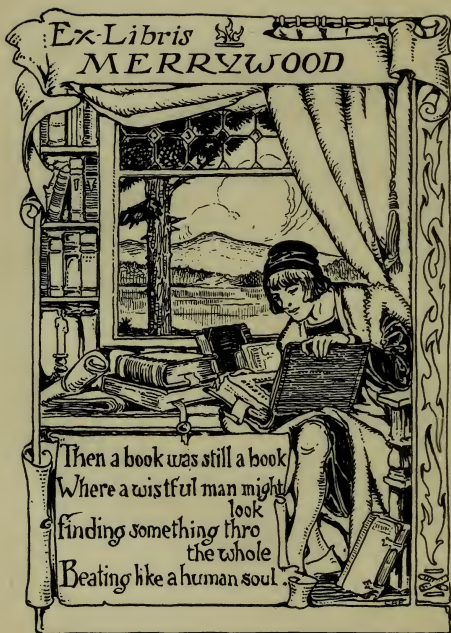


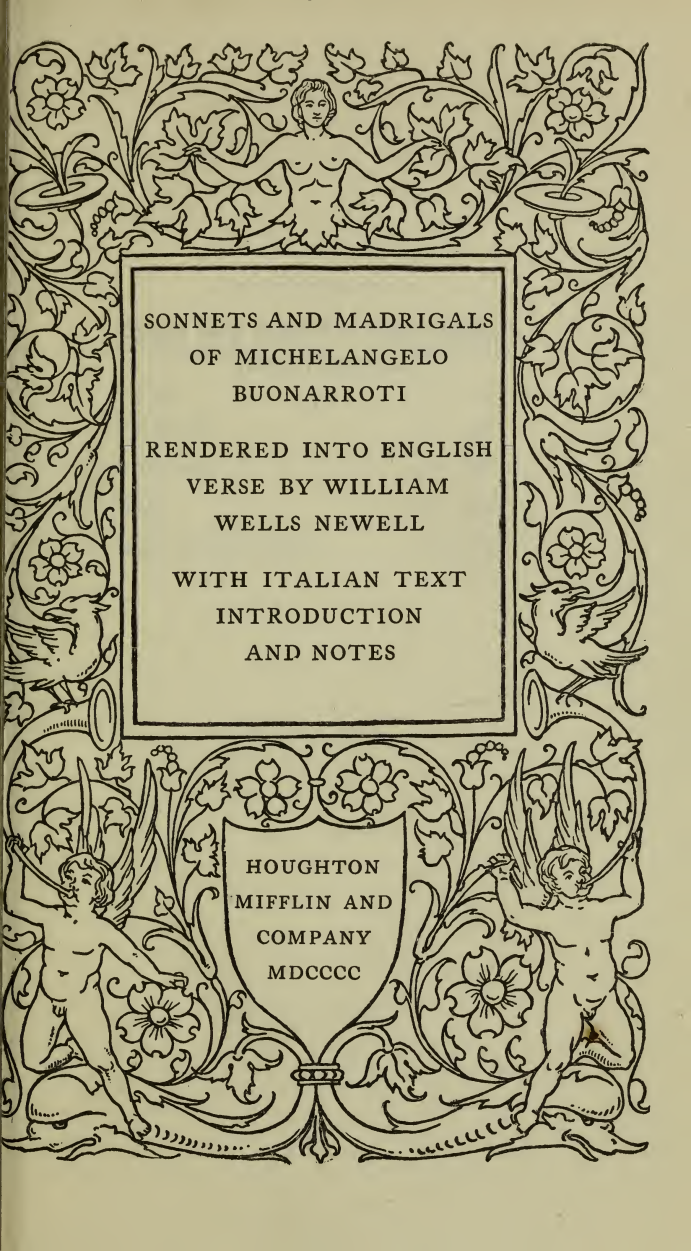
SONNETS
& MADRIG
ALS OF
MICHEL
ANGELO
BUONAR
ROTI &
RENDER
ED INTO
ENGLISH
VERSE BY
WILLIAM
AWBLES &
NEVELL

[Pulsifer, née Houghton]



SONNETS AND MADRIGALS
OF MICHELANGELO
BUONARROTI



A highly decorative border surrounds the text. At the top center is a nude female figure with her arms outstretched, surrounded by large leaves and flowers. On the left and right sides are birds perched on branches. At the bottom are two winged cherubs (putti) holding up a shield. The entire design is rendered in a classic woodcut or engraved style.

SONNETS AND MADRIGALS
OF MICHELANGELO
BUONARROTI

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH
VERSE BY WILLIAM
WELLS NEWELL

WITH ITALIAN TEXT
INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES

HOUGHTON
MIFFLIN AND
COMPANY
MDCCCC

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1765

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MICHELANGELO AS
POET



MICHELANGELO AS
POET

MICHELANGELO, who considered himself as primarily sculptor, afterwards painter, disclaimed the character of poet by profession. He was nevertheless prolific in verse; the pieces which survive, in number more than two hundred, probably represent only a small part of his activity in this direction. These compositions are not to be considered merely as the amusement of leisure, the byplay of fancy; they represent continued meditation, frequent reworking, careful balancing of words; he worked on a sonnet or a madrigal in the same manner as on a statue, conceived with ardent imagination, undertaken with creative energy, pursued under the pressure of a superabundance of ideas, occasionally abandoned in dissatisfaction, but at other times elaborated to that final excellence which exceeds as well as includes all merits of the sketch, and, as he himself said,

constitutes a rebirth of the idea into the realm of eternity. In the sculptor's time, the custom of literary society allowed and encouraged interchange of verses. If the repute of the writer or the attraction of the rhymes commanded interest, these might be copied, reach an expanding circle, and achieve celebrity. In such manner, partly through the agency of Michelangelo himself, the sonnets of Vittoria Colonna came into circulation, and obtained an acceptance ending in a printed edition. But the artist did not thus arrange his own rhymes, does not appear even to have kept copies; written on stray leaves, included in letters, they remained as loose memoranda, or were suffered altogether to disappear. The fame of the author secured attention for anything to which he chose to set his hand; the verses were copied and collected, and even gathered into the form of books; one such manuscript gleaning he revised with his own hand. The sonnets became known, the songs were set to music, and the recognition of their merit induced a contemporary author, in the seventy-first year of the poet's life, to deliver before the Florentine Academy a lecture on a single sonnet.

Diffusion through the printing-press, how-

MICHELANGELO AS POET

ever, the poems did not attain. Not until sixty years after the death of their author did a grand-nephew, also called Michelangelo Buonarroti, edit the verse of his kinsman; in this task he had regard to supposed literary proprieties, conventionalizing the language and sentiment of lines which seemed harsh or impolite, supplying endings for incomplete compositions, and in general doing his best to deprive the verse of an originality which the age was not inclined to tolerate. The recast was accepted as authentic, and in this mutilated form the poetry remained accessible. Fortunately the originals survived, partly in the handwriting of the author, and in 1863 were edited by Guasti. The publication added to the repute of the compositions, and the sonnets especially have become endeared to many English readers.

The long neglect of Michelangelo's poetry was owing to the intellectual deficiencies of the succeeding generation. In spite of the partial approbation of his contemporaries, it is likely that these were not much more appreciative, and that their approval was rendered rather to the fame of the maker than to the merits of the work. The complication of

the thought, frequently requiring to be thought out word for word, demanded a mental effort beyond the capacity of literati whose ideal was the simplicity and triviality of Petrarchian imitators. Varchi assuredly had no genuine comprehension of the sonnet to which he devoted three hours of his auditors' patience; Berni, who affirmed that Michelangelo wrote things, while other authors used words, to judge by his own compositions could scarce have been more sensible of the artist's emotional depth. The sculptor, who bitterly expressed his consciousness that for the highest elements of his genius his world had no eyes, must have felt a similar lack of sympathy with his poetical conceptions. Here he stood on less safe ground; unacquainted with classic literature, unable correctly to write a Latin phrase, he must have known, to use his own metaphor, that while he himself might value plain homespun, the multitude admired the stuffs of silk and gold that went to the making of a tailors' man. It is likely that the resulting intellectual loneliness assumed the form of modesty, and that Michelangelo took small pains to preserve his poetry because he set on it no great value.

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The verse, essentially lyric, owed its inspiration to experience. A complete record would have constituted a biography more intimate than any other. But such memorial does not exist; of early productions few survive; the extant poems, for the most part, appear to have been composed after the sixtieth year of their author.

The series begins with a sonnet written in 1506, when Michelangelo was thirty-one years of age. The sculptor had been called to Rome by pope Julius, who conceived that the only way to ensure an adequately magnificent mausoleum was to prepare it during his own lifetime. A splendid design was made for the monument destined to prove the embarrassment of Michelangelo's career; but the pope was persuaded that it was not worth while to waste his means in marbles, and in the spring of 1506 the artist fled to Florence. In that city he may have penned the sonnet in which Julius is blamed for giving ear to the voice of Echo (misreporting calumniators) instead of holding the balance even and the sword erect (in the character of a sculptured Justice). The writer adds a bitter complaint of the injustice of fate, which sends merit to pluck the fruit

of a withered bough. Another sonnet of the period seems to have been written in Rome; the subscription reads: "Your Michelangelo, in Turkey." The piece contains an indictment against the papal court, at that time occupied with plans for military advancement, where the eucharistic cup is changed into helmet, and cross into lance; for safety's sake, let Christ keep aloof from a city where his blood would be sold dropwise. Work there is none, and the Medusa-like pope turns the artist to stone; if poverty is beloved by heaven, the servants of heaven, under the opposite banner, are doing their best to destroy that other life. In 1509, a sonnet addressed to Giovanni of Pistoia describes the sufferings endured in executing the frescoes of the Sistine chapel. We are shown Michelangelo bent double on his platform, the paint oozing on his face, his eyes blurred and squinting, his fancy occupied with conjecture of the effect produced on spectators standing below. Allusion is made to hostile critics; the writer bids his friend maintain the honor of one who does not profess to be a painter. While looking upward to the vault retained in the memory of many persons as the most holy spot in

Europe, it is well to recollect the sufferings of the artist, who in an unaccustomed field of labor achieved a triumph such as no other decorator has obtained. A fourth sonnet, addressed to the same Giovanni, reveals the flaming irritability of a temper prone to exaggerate slights, especially from a Pistoian, presumably insensible to the preëminence of Florence, "that precious joy."

With this group can be certainly classed only one sonnet of a different character (No. XX). This was penned on a letter of December, 1507, addressed to Michelangelo at Bologna, where he was then leading a miserable life, engaged on the statue of Julius; this work, on which he wasted three years, was finally melted into a cannon, in order that the enemies of the pope might fire at the latter by means of his own likeness. The verse is a spontaneous and passionate outburst of admiration for a beautiful girl. With this piece might be associated two or three undated compositions of similar nature, which serve to show the error of the supposition that the artist was insensible to feminine attractions. It may be affirmed that the reverse was the case, and that the thoughtful temper of the extant poetry

is due solely to the sobering influences of time.

The verse which might have exhibited the transition from early to later manhood has not been preserved; during twenty years survive no compositions of which the date is assured. Subsequently to that time, assistance is derived from the fortunate accident that several of the sonnets were written on dated letters. It is true that this indication is far from furnishing secure testimony. Even at the present day, when paper is so easily obtained, I have known a writer of rhyme who was in the habit of using the backs of old letters. That Michelangelo sometimes did the same thing appears to be demonstrated by the existence of a sonnet (No. L), which, though written on the back of a letter of 1532, professes to be composed in extreme old age. The evidence, therefore, is of value only when supported by the character of the piece. Nor is internal testimony entirely to be depended on. It is to be remembered that all makers of verse remodel former work, complete imperfect essays, put into form reminiscences which essentially belong to an earlier stage of feeling. Attempts to classify the productions must follow a sub-

jective opinion, very apt to err. Nevertheless something may be accomplished in this direction.

The nephew states that two sonnets (Nos. XXIV and XXV) were found on a leaf containing a memorandum of 1529. Extant is another sonnet, certainly written on a page having an entry of that year. These three sonnets seem to breathe the same atmosphere; the emotion is sustained by a direct impulse, the verse is apparently inspired by a sentiment too lyric to be unhappy; the employment of theologic metaphor and Platonic fancy is still subsidiary to emotion. Allowing for the imaginative indulgence of feeling common to lyrical poets, it seems nevertheless possible to perceive a basis of personal experience. With these pieces may be associated a number of sonnets and madrigals, among the most beautiful productions of the author, which may conjecturally be assigned to the period before his permanent Roman residence, or at any rate may be supposed to represent the impressions of such time. As compared with the work which may with confidence be dated as produced within the ensuing decade, these correspond to an earlier manner. Wanting the

direct and impetuous passion of the few youthful verses, they nevertheless show a spiritual conception of sexual attachment, not yet resolved into religious aspiration. They suggest that the inflammable and gentle-hearted artist passed through a series of inclinations, none of which terminated in a permanent alliance.

At the end of 1534, near his sixtieth year, Michelangelo came to live in Rome; and to that city, three years later, Vittoria Colonna came for a long visit, in the twelfth year of her widowhood, and the forty-seventh of her life. An acquaintance may have been established in the course of previous years, when the lady visited Rome, or possibly even at a prior time. Whatever was the date of the first encounter, allusions in the poems seem to imply that the meeting produced a deep impression on the mind of the artist (Madrigals LIV, LXXII). At all events, the relations of the two grew into a friendship, hardly to be termed intimacy. Only a very few of the poems are known to have been addressed to Vittoria; but the veiled references of several pieces, and the tone of the poetry, appear to justify the opinion that admiration for this

friend was the important influence that affected the character of the verse written during the ten years before her death in 1547.

In Rome, the Marchioness of Pescara made her home in the convent of San Silvestro, where she reigned as queen of an intelligent circle. A charming and welcome glimpse of this society is furnished by Francis of Holland, who professes to relate three conversations, held on as many Sunday mornings, in which the sculptor took a chief part. It is not difficult to imagine the calmness and coolness of the place, the serious and placid beauty of the celebrated lady, the figure of Michelangelo, the innocent devices by which the sympathetic Vittoria contrived to educe his vehement outbursts on artistic questions, the devout listening of the stranger, hanging on the chief artist of Italy with the attention of a reporter who means to put all into a book. So far as the conversation represents a symposium on matters of art, no doubt the account is to be taken as in good measure the method adopted by Francis to put before the world his own ideas; but among the remarks are many so consonant to the character of the sculptor that it is impossible to doubt the essential correctness of the narration.

In the language of Michelangelo speaks haughty reserve, the consciousness of superiority, accompanied by a sense that his most precious qualities exceeded the comprehension of a world which rendered credit less to the real man than to the fashionable artist, and whose attention expressed not so much gratitude for illumination as desire of becoming associated with what society held in respect.

All students who have had occasion to concern themselves with the biography of Vittoria Colonna have become impressed with the excellence of her character. After the loss of a husband to whom she had been united in extreme youth, she declared her intention of forming no new ties; and it must have been an exceptional purity which the censorious and corrupt world could associate with no breath of scandal. She had been accounted the most beautiful woman in Italy, of that golden-haired and broadbrowed type recognized as favorite; but her intelligence, rather than personal attractions or social position, had made her seclusion in Ischia a place of pilgrimage for men of letters. The attraction she possessed for the lonely, reserved, and proud artist is a testimony that to her belonged especially the inexplicable at-

traction of a sympathetic nature. Such disposition is a sufficient explanation of her devotion to the memory of a husband who appears to have been essentially a *condottiere* of the time, a soldier who made personal interest his chief consideration. She may also be credited with a sound judgment and pure ethical purpose in the practical affairs of life.

Yet to allow that Vittoria Colonna was good and lovable does not make it necessary to worship her as a tenth muse, according to the partial judgment of her contemporaries. Unfortunately, time has spared her verses, respecting which may be repeated advice bestowed by Mrs. Browning in regard to another female author, by no means to indulge in the perusal, inasmuch as they seem to disprove the presence of a talent which she nevertheless probably possessed. In the case commented on by the modern writer, the genius absent in the books is revealed in the correspondence; but epistolary composition was not the forte of the Marchioness of Pescara, whose communications, regarded as pabulum for a hungry heart, are as jejune as can be conceived. Neither is she to be credited with originality in her attitude toward political or religious problems. It does

not appear that she quarreled with the principles of the polite banditti of her own family; nor was she able to attain even an elementary notion of Italian patriotism. She has been set down as a reformer in religion; but such tendency went no further than a sincere affection toward the person of the founder of Christianity, a piety in no way inconsistent with ritual devotion. When it came to the dividing of the ways, she had no thought other than to follow the beaten track. Nor in the world of ideas did she possess greater independence; with all her esteem for Michelangelo as artist and man, it is not likely that she was able to estimate the sources of his supremacy, any more than to foresee a time when her name would have interest for the world only as associated with that of the sculptor. It may be believed that a mind capable of taking pleasure in the commonplaces of her rhyme could never have appreciated the essential merits of the mystic verse which she inspired. Here, also, Michelangelo was destined to remain uncomprehended. Vittoria presented him with her own poems, neatly written out and bound, but never seems to have taken the pains to gather those of the artist. Intellectually, therefore,

her limitations were many ; but she was endowed with qualities more attractive, a gentle sympathy, a noble kindness, a person and expression representative of that ideal excellence which the sculptor could appreciate only as embodied in human form.

While earlier writers of biography were inclined to exaggerate the effect on Michelangelo of his acquaintance with Vittoria Colonna, later authors, as I think, have fallen into the opposite error. To Vittoria, indeed, whose thoughts, when not taken up with devotional exercises, were occupied with the affairs of her family or of the church, such amity could occupy only a subordinate place. One of her letters to Michelangelo may be taken as a polite repression of excessive interest. But on the other side, the poetry of the artist is a clear, almost a painful expression of his own state of mind. We are shown, in the mirror of his own verse, a sensitive, self-contained, solitary nature, aware that he is out of place in a world for which he lacks essential graces and in which he is respected for his least worthy qualities. That under such circumstances he should value the kindness of the only woman with whom he could intelligently converse, that he should

feel the attraction of eyes from which seemed to descend starry influences, that he should suffer from the sense of inadequacy and transitoriness, from the difference of fortune and the lapse of years, the contrasts of imagination and possibility, was only, as he would have said, to manifest attribute in act, to suffer the natural pain incident to sensitive character.

In the most striking of the compositions devoted to the memory of Vittoria Colonna Michelangelo speaks of her influence as the tool by which his own genius had been formed, and which, when removed to heaven and made identical with the divine archetype, left no earthly substitute. That the language was no more than an expression of the fact is shown by the alteration which from this time appears in his verse. Poetry passes over into piety; artistic color is exchanged for the monotone of religious emotion. One may be glad that the old age, of whose trials he has left a terrible picture, found its support and alleviation; yet the later poems, distressing in their solemnity, pietistic in their self-depreciation, exhibit a declining poetic faculty, and in this respect are not to be ranked with their forerunners.

The verse of Michelangelo has been lauded

as philosophic. The epithet is out of place; if by philosophy be meant metaphysics, there is no such thing as philosophic poetry. Poetry owes no debt to metaphysical speculation, can coexist as well with one type of doctrine as with another. The obligation is on the other side; philosophy is petrified poetry, which no infusion of adventitious sap can relegate to vital function. Like all other developments of life, philosophic theories can be employed by poets only for colors of the palette. If Platonic conceptions be deemed exceptional, it is because such opinions are themselves poetry more than metaphysics, and constitute rather metaphorical expressions for certain human sentiments than any system of ratiocination. For the purposes of Michelangelo, these doctrines supplied an adequate means of presentation, quite independent of the abstract verity of the principles considered as the product of reasoning.

With the sculptor, it was the impressions and feelings of later life that this philosophy served to convey. The few remains of comparative youth lead us to suppose that in the verse of this time the reflective quality was subordinate; the productions of later manhood breathe

a gentle emotion, which, allowing for contrasts, may be compared with that animating the poetry of Wordsworth; only in compositions belonging to incipient age do we find a full development of Platonic conceptions; these, again, constitute a step in the progress toward that Christian quietism into which the stream of the poet's genius emerges, as from its impetuous source, through the powerful flow of its broadening current, a great river at last empties itself into the all-encompassing sea.

This philosophy was no result of reading, but a deposit from conversations which the youth had overheard in the Medicean gardens, where he may have listened to the eloquence of Marsilio Ficino. When the time came, these reminiscences were able to influence imagination and color fancy. For a commentary on Michelangelo, one has no need to go to the *Phaedrus* or *Symposium*; the verse, like all true poetry, is self-illuminative. That God is the archetype and fountain-head of all excellency, that external objects suggest the perfection they do not include, that objects of nature, reflected in the mirror of the intelligence, move the soul to perform the creative act by which outward beauty is reborn into her own likeness,

and loved as the representation of her own divinity, that the highest property of external things is to cause human thought to transcend from the partial to the universal, — these are conceptions so simple and natural that no course of study is necessary to their appreciation. The ideas are received as symbols of certain moral conditions, and so far not open to debate. Only when the attempt is made to generalize, to set them up as the sum of all experience, do they become doubtful; the principles are better comprehended without the dialectic, and indeed it frequently happens that he who has paid most attention to the latter is least informed respecting the true significance of the imaginations for the sake of which the argument professes to exist.

Hand in hand with this Hellenic, one might say human mysticism, went the Christian mysticism expressed in the poetry of Dante. In place of the serene archetype, the apotheosis of reason, we are presented with the archetypal love, reaching out toward mankind through the forms of nature. No longer the calm friend, the beloved person is conceived as the ardent angel, messenger from the empyrean, descending and revealing. It has been held that these

two forms of thought are irreconcilable; I should consider them as complementary. Before the beginnings of the Christian church had been effected a union of Platonic imagination with Hebrew piety; Christian sentiment expresses in terms of affection the philosophic doctrine, also pious and poetic, however proclaimed under the name and with the coloring of sober reason.

It could not have been expected that in the poetical activity which of necessity with him remained a subordinate interest, Michelangelo should have manifested the full measure of that independent force, which in two arts had proved adequate to break new channels. This third method of expression served to manifest a part of his nature for which grander tasks did not supply adequate outlets; the verse accordingly reveals new aspects of character. It was for gentle, wistful, meditative emotions that the artist found it necessary to use rhyme. If not torrential, the current was vital; no line unrefreshed by living waters. This function explains the limitation of scope; essays in pastoral, in *terza rima*, served to prove that here did not lie his path; in the conventional forms of the sonnet and the madrigal he found the

medium desired. The familiarity of the form did not prevent originality of substance; he had from youth been intimate with the youthful melodies of Dante, the lucid sonnets of Petrarch; but his own style, controlled by thought, is remote from the gentle music of the one, the clear flow of the other. The verse exhibits a superabundance of ideas, not easily brought within the limits of the rhyme; amid an imagery prevailingly tender and reflective, now and then a gleam or a flash reveals the painter of the Sistine and the sculptor of the Medicean chapel.

Essentially individual is the artistic imagery. As Michelangelo was above all a creator whose genius inclined him toward presentation of the unadorned human form, so his metaphors are prevailingly taken from the art of sculpture, a loan which enriches the verse by the association with immortal works. These comparisons, taken from the methods of the time, are not altogether such as could now be employed. At the outset, indeed, the procedure scarcely differed; with the sculptor of the Renaissance, the first step was to produce a sketch of small dimensions; the same thing is done by the modern artist, who commonly uses clay and plaster

in place of wax. It is in the nature of the design, or, as Michelangelo said, of the "model," that, as having the character of an impression, it must superabound in rude vitality, as much as it is deficient in symmetry and "measure." The next step, then as now, might be the preparation of a form answering in size to that of the intended figure, but also in wax or clay. In the final part of the process, however, the distinction is complete; in the sixteenth century no way was open to the maker, but himself to perfect the statue with hammer and chisel. The advance of mechanical skill has enabled the modern artist to dispense with this labor. It may be questioned whether the consequent saving of pains is in all respects an advantage; at least, I have the authority of one of the most accomplished of modern portrait sculptors for the opinion that in strict propriety every kind of plastic work ought to receive its final touches from the hand of the designer. Even if this were done, the method would not answer to that of the earlier century, when it was the practice to cleave away the marble in successive planes, in such manner as gradually to disengage the outlines of the image, which thus appeared to lie veiled beneath the superficies, as an indwell-

ing tenant waiting release from the hand of the carver. Moreover, the preciousness of the material had on the fancy a salutary influence; before beginning his task, the sculptor was compelled to take into account the possibility of execution. He would commonly feel himself obliged to make use of any particular block of marble which he might have the fortune to possess; it might even happen that such block possessed an unusual form, as was the case with the stone placed at the disposal of Michelangelo, and from which he created his David. The test of genius would therefore be the ability, on perception of the material, to form a suitable conception; a sculptor, if worthy of the name, would perceive the possible statue within the mass. The metaphor, so frequently and beautifully used by Michelangelo, which represents the artist as conceiving the dormant image which his toil must bring forth from its enveloping stone, is therefore no commonplace of scholastic philosophy, no empty phrase declaring that matter potentially contains unnumbered forms, but a true description of the process of creative energy. Inasmuch as by an inevitable animism all conceptions derived from human activity are imaginatively trans-

ferred to external life, the comparison is extended into the realm of Nature, which by a highly poetic forecast of the modern doctrine of evolution is said through the ages to aim at attaining an ideal excellence. The impulse visible in the art of the sculptor thus appears in his poetry, which, also perfected through unwearied toil, terminates in a result which is truly organic, and of which all parts seem to derive from a central idea.

A lyric poet, if he possess genuine talent, is concerned with the presentation, not of form or thought, but of emotion. His fancy, therefore, commonly operates in a manner different from that of the artist, whose duty it is primarily to consider the visual image; the verse of the latter, if he undertakes to express himself also in the poetic manner, is usually characterized by a predominance of detail, an overdistinctness of parts, an inability of condensation, qualities belonging to an imagination conceiving of life as definitely formal rather than as vaguely impressive. On the contrary, Michelangelo is a true lyrist, whose mental vision is not too concrete to be also dreamy. This property is a strange proof of the multiformity of his genius, for it is the reverse of what one

MICHELANGELO AS POET

would expect from a contemplation of his plastic work. The inspiration, though in a measure biographic, is no mere reflection of the experience; notwithstanding the sincerity of the impulse, as should be the case in lyric verse, the expression transcends to the universal.

It does not detract from his worth as a lyrical writer, that the range of the themes is narrow, a limitation sufficiently explained by the conditions. The particular sentiment for the expression of which he needed rhyme was sexual affection. In the verse, if not in the art, "all thoughts, all passions, all delights" are ministers of that emotion. Michelangelo is as much a poet of love as Heine or Shelley.

The sonnets were intended not to be sung, but to be read; this purpose may account for occasional deficiencies of music. The beauty of the idea, the abundance of the thought, the sincerity of the emotion, cause them to stand in clear contrast to the productions of contemporary versifiers.

Less attention has been paid to the madrigals, on which the author bestowed equal pains. These are songs, and the melody has affected the thought. The self-consciousness of the

poet is subordinated to the objectivity of the musician who aims to render human experience into sweet sound. For the most part, and with some conspicuous exceptions, even where the idea is equally mystical, the reasoning is not so intricate nor the sentiment so biographic. A certain number have the character of simple love-verse. In these compositions ardor is unchecked by reflection, and desire allowed its natural course, unquenched by the abundant flow of the thought which it has awakened. What assumes the aspect of love-sorrow is in reality a joyous current of life mocking grief with the music of its ripples. If one desired to name the composer whom the sentiment suggests, he might mention Schumann rather than Beethoven.

Other indifferent artists have been excellent poets, and other tolerable versifiers clever artists; but only once in human history has co-existed the highest talent for plastic form and verbal expression. Had these verses come down without name, had they been disinterred from the dust of a library as the legacy of an anonymous singer, they would be held to confer on the maker a title to rank among intellectual benefactors. It would be said that an unknown

MICHELANGELO AS POET

poet, whose verse proved him also a sculptor, had contributed to literature thoughts whose character might be summed up in the lines of his madrigal: —

*Dalle più alte stelle
Discende uno splendore
Che 'l desir tira a quelle ;
E qui si chiama amore.*

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE PRESENT TIME
BY
NATHANIEL BENTLEY
VOLUME I
BOSTON: PUBLISHED BY
J. B. ALLEN, 1856.

SONNETS EPIGRAMS AND
MADRIGALS

A SELECTION FROM THE SONNETS
OF MICHELANGELO
BUONARROTI

ITALIAN TEXT

I



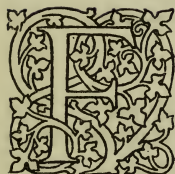
AL ciel discese, e col mortal suo, poi
Che visto ebbe l' inferno giusto
e 'l pio,
Ritornò vivo a contemplare Dio,
Per dar di tutto il vero lume a
noi :

Lucente stella, che co' raggi suoi
Fe chiaro, a torto, el nido ove naqu' io ;
Nè sare' 'l premio tutto 'l mondo rio :
Tu sol, che la creasti, esser quel puoi.
Di Dante dico, che mal conosciute
Fur l' opre suo da quel popolo ingrato,
Che solo a' iusti manca di salute.
Fuss' io pur lui ! c' a tal fortuna nato,
Per l' aspro esilio suo, con la virtute,
Dare' del mondo il più felice stato.

A SELECTION FROM THE SONNETS
OF MICHELANGELO
BUONARROTI

TRANSLATION

I



FROM heaven he came, and clothed
in mortal clay,
Traversed the vengeful and
the chastening woes,
Living, again toward height
eternal rose,

For us to win the light of saving day ;
Resplendent star, whose undeservèd ray
Made glory in the nest where I had birth ;
Whose recompense not all a stainèd earth,
But Thou his Maker, Thou alone couldst pay.
Dante I mean, and that unfair return
Endured from a community ingrate,
That only to the just awardeth scorn ;
Would I were he ! To equal fortune born,
For his pure virtue, for his exile stern,
I would resign earth's happiest estate.

I I

DA che concetto ha l' arte intera e diva
 La forma e gli atti d' alcun, poi di quello
 D' umil materia un semplice modello
 È 'l primo parto che da quel deriva.
 Ma nel secondo poi di pietra viva
 S' adempion le promesse del martello ;
 E sì rinasce tal concetto e bello,
 Che ma' non è chi suo eterno prescriva.
 Simil, di me model, nacqu' io da prima ;
 Di me model, per cosa più perfetta
 Da voi rinascere poi, donna alta e degna.
 Se 'l poco accresce, e 'l mio superchio lima
 Vostra pietà ; qual penitenzia aspetta
 Mio fiero ardor, se mi gastiga e insegna ?

I I I

NON ha l' ottimo artista alcun concetto,
 Ch' un marmo solo in sè non circonscriva
 Col suo soverchio ; e solo a quello arriva
 La man che ubbidisce all' intelletto.
 Il mal ch' io fuggo, e 'l ben ch' io mi prometto,
 In te, donna leggiadra, altera e diva,
 Tal si nasconde ; e perch' io più non viva,
 Contraria ho l' arte al disiato effetto.
 Amor dunque non ha, nè tua beltate,
 O durezza, o fortuna, o gran disdegno,
 Del mio mal colpa, o mio destino o sorte ;
 Se dentro del tuo cor morte è pietate
 Porti in un tempo, e che 'l mio basso ingegno
 Non sappia, ardendo, trarne altro che morte.

I I

SOME deed or form of our humanity
 When genius hath conceived of art divine,
 Her primal birth, an incomplete design,
 Is shaped in stuff of humble quality.
 More late, in living marble's purity
 The chisel keepeth promise to the full;
 Reborn is the idea so beautiful,
 That it belongeth to eternity.
 So me did Nature make the model rude,
 The model of myself, a better thing
 By nobleness of thine to be renewed;
 If thy compassion, its work cherishing,
 Enlarge, and pare; mine ardor unsubdued
 Awaiteth at thy hand what chastening!

I I I

THE chief of artists can imagine nought,
 Other than form that hideth in a stone,
 Below its surface veiled; here alone
 Arriveth hand, obedient to his thought.
 So, fair and noble lady, e'en in thee,
 The good I seek, the evil that I fly,
 Remain enveloped; whence reluctant, I
 Create my aspiration's contrary.
 It is not love, 't is not thy beauty fair,
 Ungentle pride, thy fortune ruling so,
 Nor destiny of mine, that hath to bear
 The censure, if my genius faint and low,
 While Death and Pity both thou dost conceal,
 Though passionèd, can only Death reveal.

COM' esser, donna, può quel ch' alcun vede
 Per lunga sperienza, che più dura
 L' immagin viva in pietra alpestra e dura,
 Che 'l suo fattor, che gli anni in cener riede?
 La causa all' effetto inclina e cede,
 Onde dall' arte è vinta la natura.
 Io 'l so, che 'l provo in la bella scultura;
 Ch' all' opra il tempo e morte non tien fede.
 Dunque posso ambo noi dar lunga vita
 In qual sie modo, o di colore o sasso,
 Di noi sembrando l' uno e l' altro volto:
 Sì che mill' anni dopo la partita
 Quanto e voi bella fusti, e quant' io lasso
 Si veggia, e com' amarvi io non fui stolto.

Io mi son caro assai più ch' io non soglio;
 Poi ch' io t' ebbi nel cor, più di me vaglio:
 Come pietra ch' aggiuntovi l' intaglio,
 È di più pregio che 'l suo primo scoglio.
 O come scritta o pinta carta o foglio,
 Più si riguarda d' ogni straccio o taglio;
 Tal di me fo, da poi ch' io fui bersaglio
 Segnato dal tuo viso: e non mi doglio.
 Sicur con tale stampa in ogni loco
 Vo, come quel c' ha incanti o arme seco,
 Ch' ogni periglio gli fan venir meno.
 I' vaglio contro all' acqua e contro al foco,
 Col segno tuo rallumino ogni cieco,
 E col mio sputo sano ogni veleno.

I V

How, lady, can the mind of man allow,
 What lapse of many ages hath made known,
 That image shapen of pure mountain stone
 Outlive the life that did with life endow?
 Before effect the very cause doth bow,
 And Art is crowned in Nature's deep despair.
 I know, and prove it, carving form so fair,
 That Time and Death admire, and break their
 vow.

Power, therefore, I possess, to grant us twain
 Estate, in color, or in marble cold,
 That spent a thousand summers, shall remain
 The face of either, and all eyes behold
 How thou wert beautiful, and gaze on me,
 Weary, yet justified in loving thee.

V

I FEEL myself more precious than of yore,
 Now that my life thy signature doth show,
 As gem inscribed with its intaglio
 Excelleth pebble it appeared before,
 Or writ or painted page is valued more
 Than idle leaf discarded carelessly;
 So I, the target of thine archery,
 Grow proud of marks I need not to deplore.
 Signed with thy seal, in confidence I dwell,
 As one who journeyeth in woundless mail,
 Or hath his way protected by a spell;
 O'er fire and flood I equally prevail,
 Do works of healing by the signet's might,
 Poison allay, and yield the blind their sight.

VI

QUANTO si gode, lieta e ben contesta
 Di fior, sopra' crin d' or d' una, grillanda ;
 Che l' altro inanzi l' uno all' altro manda,
 Come ch' il primo sia a baciare la testa !
 Contenta è tutto il giorno quella uesta
 Che serra 'l petto, e poi par che si spanda ;
 E quel c' oro filato si domanda
 Le guanci' e 'l collo di toccar non resta.
 Ma più lieto quel nastro par che goda,
 Dorato in punta, con sì fatte tempere,
 Che preme e tocca il petto ch' egli allaccia.
 E la schietta cintura che s' annoda
 Mi par dir seco : qui vo' stringier sempre !
 Or che farebbon dunche le mie braccia ?

VII

SE nel volto per gli occhi il cor si vede,
 Altro segno non ho più manifesto
 Della mie fiamma : addunche basti or questo,
 Signior mie caro, a domandar mercede.
 Forse lo spirto tuo, con maggior fede
 Ch' io non credo, che sguarda il foco onesto
 Che m' arde, fie di me pietoso e presto ;
 Come grazia ch' abbonda a chi ben chiede.
 O felice quel dì, se questo è certo !
 Fermisi in un momento il tempo e l' ore,
 Il giorno e il sol nella su' antica traccia ;
 Acciò ch' i' abbi, e non già per mie merto,
 Il desiato mie dolce signore
 Per sempre nell' indegnie e pronte braccia.

V I

THE blossom-twinèd garland of her hair
 Delighteth so to crown her sunny tress,
 That flowers one before the other press
 To be the first to kiss that forehead fair ;
 Her gown all day puts on a blithesome air,
 Clingeth, then floweth free for happiness ;
 Her meshèd net rejoiceth to caress
 The cheek whereby it lies, and nestle there ;
 More fortunate, her golden-pointed lace
 Taketh her breathing in as close a hold
 As if it cherished what it may enfold ;
 And simple zone that doth her waist embrace
 Seemeth to plead : “ Here give me leave to
 stay ! ”
 What would my arms do, if they had their way ?

V I I

IF eyes avail heart-passion to declare,
 My love requires no more explicit sign,
 For eloquent enow are looks of mine,
 O dear my mistress, to convey my prayer.
 Perchance, more credulous than I believe,
 Thou seest how purely doth my passion burn,
 And now art ready toward desire to turn,
 As he who asketh mercy must receive.
 If so befall, on that thrice happy day
 Let course of time be suddenly complete,
 The sun give over his primeval race ;
 That through no merit of my own, I may
 Henceforth forever, my desirèd sweet
 In these unworthy, eager arms embrace !

VIII

SPIRTO *ben nato, in cui si specchia e vede*
Nelle tuo belle membra oneste e care
Quante natura e 'l ciel tra no' può fare,
Quand' a null' altra suo bell' opra cede :
Spirto leggiadro, in cui si spera e crede
Dentro, come di fuor nel viso appare,
Amor, pietà, mercè ; cose sì rare,
Che ma' furn' in beltà con tanta fede :
L' amor mi prende, e la beltà mi lega ;
La pietà, la mercè con dolci sguardi
Ferma speranz' al cor par che ne doni.
Qual uso o qual governo al mondo niega,
Qual crudeltà per tempo, o qual più tardi,
C' a sì bel viso morte non perdoni ?

IX

DIMMI *di grazia, amor, se gli occhi mei*
Veggono 'l ver della beltà ch' aspiro,
O s' io l' ho dentro allor che, dov' io miro,
Veggio più bello el viso di costei.
Tu 'l de' saper, po' che tu vien con lei
A torm' ogni mie pace, ond' io m' adiro ;
Nè vorre' manco un minimo sospiro,
Nè men ardente foco chiederei.
La beltà che tu vedi è ben da quella ;
Ma cresce poi ch' a miglior loco sale,
Se per gli occhi mortali all' alma corre.
Quivi si fa divina, onesta e bella,
Com' a sè simil vuol cosa immortale :
Questa, e non quella, a gli occhi tuo' precorre.

VIII

O SPIRIT nobly born, wherein we see
 Through all thy members innocent and dear,
 As if reflected in a mirror clear,
 What Heaven and Nature can make life to be ;
 O spirit gentle, where by faith we know
 Indwell what doth thy countenance declare,
 Love, Mercy, and Compassion, things so rare,
 That never beauty hath combined them so ;
 The love to charm, the beauty to retain,
 The tenderness, the pity, to uphold
 By glances mild the soul that doubteth grace ;
 What mortal law, what custom doth ordain,
 What doom unmerciful to young or old,
 That Death may not forgive so fair a face ?

IX

“ LOVE, be my teacher, of thy courtesy ;
 The beauty, whither my regards aspire,
 Doth it exist ? Or is what I admire
 Made beautiful by force of fantasy ?
 Thou, Love, must know, who in her company
 Arrivest oft to vex me with desire,
 Although I would not choose to quench the fire,
 Abate its glow, nor part with any sigh.”
 “ The beauty thou hast seen from her did shine,
 And meet thy mortal vision ; but its ray
 Ascended to the soul, a better place ;
 There seemed she lovely, for a thing divine
 Hath joy of its own image ; in this way
 Came beauty thou beholdest in her face.”

NON posso altra figura immaginarmi,
 O di nud' ombra o di terrestre spoglia,
 Col più alto pensier, tal che mie voglia
 Contra la tuo beltà di quella s' armi.
 Che, da te mosso, tanto sciender parmi,
 Ch' amor d' ogni valor mi priva e spoglia ;
 Ond' a pensar di minuir mie doglia,
 Duplicando, la morte viene a darmi.
 Però non val che più sproni mie fuga,
 Doppiando 'l corso alla beltà nemica ;
 Che il men dal più velocie non si scosta.
 Amor con le sue man gli occhi m' asciuga,
 Promettendomi cara ogni fatica ;
 Chè vile esser non può chi tanto costa.

XI

LA vita del mie amor non è 'l cor mio,
 Ch' amor, di quel ch' io t' amo, è senza core ;
 Dov' è cosa mortal piena d' errore,
 Esser non può già ma', nè pensier rio.
 Amor nel dipartir l' alma da Dio
 Me fe' san occhio, e te luc' e splendore ;
 Nè può non rivederlo in quel che muore
 Di te, per nostro mal, mie gran disio.
 Come dal foco el caldo esser diviso
 Non può, dal bell' eterno ogni mie stima,
 Ch' esalta, ond' ella vien, chi più 'l somiglia.
 Tu c' hai negli occhi tutto 'l paradiso,
 Per ritornar là dov' i' t' ama' prima,
 Ricorro ardendo sott' alle tuo ciglia.

MY strong imagination cannot make
 From solid earth or air of reverie,
 The form of beauty, that my will can take
 To be its shield and armor against thee.
 Abandoned, I decline, till everything
 Doth vanish, that I am and I possess ;
 The thought that haply I may suffer less,
 Destroyeth me beyond all suffering.
 No hope of safety, when to turn and flee
 Will only speed an enemy's career ;
 The slower from the fleeter cannot stray ;
 Yet Love consoleth and caresseth me,
 Declaring that my toil may yet be dear ;
 A thing so costly is not thrown away.

MY love doth use no dwelling in the heart,
 But maketh mansion only in the soul ;
 He entereth not where sinful hopes control,
 Where error and mortality have part.
 From source in God commanded to depart,
 Myself He made the eye, the lustre, thee ;
 I cannot choose but His eternal see,
 In what, alas ! is thy decaying part.
 No more may fire be sundered from its heat,
 Than my desire from that celestial Fair
 Whence thine derives, wherewith it doth compare ;
 My soul, enkindled, maketh her retreat
 To primal home, where love did first arise,
 The Paradise secluded in thine eyes.

I' MI credetti, il primo giorno ch' io
 Mira' tante bellezze uniche e sole,
 Fermar gli occhi, com' aquila nel sole,
 Nella minor di tante ch' i' desio.
 Po' conosciut' ho il fallo e l' erro mio ;
 Chè chi senz' ale un angel seguir vole,
 Il seme a' sassi, al vento le parole
 Indarno ispargie, e i' intelletto a Dio.
 Dunche, s' appresso il cor non mi sopporta
 L' infinita beltà, che gli occhi abbaglia,
 Nè di lontan par m' assicuri o fidi ;
 Che fie di me? qual guida o quale scorta
 Fie che con teco ma' mi giovì o vaglia,
 S' appresso m' ardi, e nel partir m' uccidi ?

VEGGIO co' bei vostri occhi un dolce lume,
 Che co' miei ciechi già veder non posso ;
 Porto co' vostri piedi un pondo a dosso,
 Che de' mie' zoppi non è già costume ;
 Volo con le vostr' ale senza piume ;
 Col vostr' ingegno al ciel sempre son mosso ;
 Dal vostr' arbitrio son pallido e rosso ;
 Freddo al sol, caldo alle più fredde brume.
 Nel voler vostro è sol la voglia mia,
 I mie' pensier nel vostro cor si fanno,
 Nel vostro fiato son le mia parole.
 Come luna da sè sol par ch' io sia ;
 Chè gli occhi nostri in ciel veder non sanno
 Se non quel tanto che n' accende il sole.

XII

I DEEMED *when erst upon my prospect shone*
The mateless splendor of thy beauty's day,
That as an eagle seeks the sun alone,
I might have rested only on a ray.
With lapse of time, mine error have I known,
For who would soar in angels' company,
On stony ground his idle seed hath sown,
Lost words in air, and thought in deity.
If near at hand, I may not well abide
Thy brilliancy that overcometh sight,
And far, appear to leave consoling light,
Ah, what shall I become? what friend, what
 guide,
Will render aid, or plead my cause with thee,
If either thou consum'st or grievest me?

XIII

WITH *thy clear eyes I view a radiance fair,*
Before to my blind vision quite unknown;
I carry with thy feet a weight, mine own,
Of halting steps, were never free to bear;
Upon thy wings I soar to heaven, and there
By thy swift genius are its glories shown;
I pale and redden at thy choice alone,
Grow chill in sunlight, warm in frosty air.
Thy will is evermore my sole desire,
Within thy heart conceived each wish of mine,
My accents framèd purely of thy breath;
Like to the moon am I, that hath no fire,
But only is beheld in heaven to shine
According as the sun illumineth.

XIV

S' UN casto amor, s' una pietà superna,
 S' una fortuna infra dua amanti equale,
 S' un' aspra sorte all' un dell' altro cale,
 S' un spirto, s' un voler duo cor governa;
 S' un' anima in duo corpi è fatta eterna,
 Ambo levando al cielo e con pari ale;
 S' amor d' un colpo e d' un dorato strale
 Le viscier di duo petti arda e discierna;
 S' amar l' un l' altro, e nessun se medesimo,
 D' un gusto e d' un diletto, a tal mercede,
 C' a un fin voglia l' uno e l' altro porre;
 Se mille e mille non sarien centesimo
 A tal nodo d' amore, a tanta fede;
 E sol l' isdegno il può rompere e sciorre?

XV

PERCHÈ tuo gran bellezze al mondo sieno
 In donna più cortese e manco dura,
 Prego se ne ripigli la natura
 Tutte quelle ch' ogn' or ti vengon meno;
 E serbi a riformar del tuo sereno
 E divin volto una gientil figura
 Del ciel, e sia d' amor perpetua cura
 Rifarne un cor di grazia e pietà pieno.
 E serbi poi i miei sospiri ancora,
 E le lacrime sparte insieme accoglia,
 E doni a chi quella ami un' altra volta.
 Forse a pietà chi nascierà 'n quell' ora
 La moverà con la mie propria doglia;
 Nè fia persa la grazia ch' or m' è tolta.

XIV

IF one chaste love, one sacred piety,
 One fortune sharèd 'twixt two lovers so,
 That either's care from heart to heart may flow,
 Impelled by one desire, one energy;
 If bodies both are by one soul controlled,
 That wingèd bears them up to heaven's gate;
 If love, with one essay, doth penetrate
 And burn two bosoms with one shaft of gold;
 If living each in other, self forgot,
 One liking, one felicity, awake
 One will to move toward one desired lot;
 If thousand ties as holy, fail to make
 A thousandth part; the consecrated knot,
 Shall pride, and pride alone, avail to break?

XV

THAT womanhood more tender and less cold
 Be clothed with beauty equal and the same,
 I pray that heaven may from thee reclaim
 Her gifts, that hourly perish and grow old,
 Of thy serene and radiant face remould
 A gentle heavenly form, and Love assign
 The task to store a heart more mild than thine
 With mercies sweet and charities untold.
 My sighs let him preserve, from every place
 My fallen wasted tears unite again,
 And on the friend of this new fair bestow.
 Thus may befall, that he who sues for grace
 Compassion shall awaken by my pain,
 And love that I have lost be garnered so.

LA ragion meco si lamenta e dole,
 Parte ch' i' spero amando esser felice ;
 Con forti esempi e con vere parole
 La mie vergogna mi ramenta, e dice :
 Che ne riporterà dal vivo sole,
 Altro che morte ? e non come fenice.
 Ma poco giova : chè chi cader vuole,
 Non basta l' altrui man pront' e vitrice.
 I' conosco e mie' danni, e 'l vero intendo :
 Dall' alta banda, albergo un altro core,
 Che più m' uccide dove più m' arrendo.
 In mezzo di due mort' è 'l mie signiore ;
 Questa non voglio, e questa non comprendo :
 Così sospeso, il corpo e l' alma muore.

NON so se s' è la desiata luce
 Del suo primo fattor, che l' alma sente ;
 O se dalla memoria della gente
 Alcun' altra beltà nel cor traluce ;
 O se fama o se sogno alcun produce
 Agli occhi manifesto, al cor presente ;
 Di sè lasciando un non so che cocente,
 Ch' è forse or quel ch' a pianger mi conduce ;
 Quel ch' i' sento e ch' i' cerco : e chi mi guidi
 Meco non è ; nè so ben veder dove
 Trovar mel possa, e par c' altri mel mostri.
 Questo, signior, m' avvien, po' ch' i' vi vidi ;
 C' un dolce amaro, un sì e no mi muove :
 Certo saranno stati gli occhi vostri.

XVI

*As oft as I am free to nourish faith
 That in my love may lie my happiness,
 With wisdom old and word of soberness
 Humility reproveth me, and saith :
 " What canst thou hope within the vivid sun,
 Save be consumed, and find no Phœnix-birth ? "*
*In vain ; for helping hand is nothing worth
 To rescue life that fain would be undone.
 I hear her warn, my peril understand,
 Yet inwardly discern a heart concealed,
 That tortureth the more, the more I yield ;
 Between two Deaths my lady seems to stand,
 One mystical, one hateful to espy ;
 Irresolute, both soul and body die.*

XVII

*I KNOW not if it be the longed-for light
 Of its Creator, that the soul doth feel,
 Or long-retentive Memory reveal
 Some creature-beauty, dwelling inly bright ;
 Or if a history, a dream, I keep.
 To eyes apparent, treasured in the heart,
 Whereof fermenteth some uneasy part,
 That now, perchance, inclineth me to weep ;
 I long, I seek, and find not any guide,
 Nor whither, of myself have wit to know,
 Yet vague perceive a presence point the way ;
 Such life I lead since thee my looks espied,
 From bitter change to sweet, from aye to no ;
 I think, thine eyes lent that enkindling ray.*

XVIII

PERCHÈ Febo non torc' e non distende
 D' intorn' a questo globo fredd' e molle
 Le braccia sua lucenti, el vulgo volle
 Notte chiamar quel sol che non comprende.
 E tant' è debil, che s' alcun accende
 Un picciol torchio, in quella parte tolle
 La vita dalla nott' ; e tant' è folle,
 Che l' esca col fucil la squarcia e fende.
 E se gli è pur che qualche cosa sia,
 Cert' è figlia del sol e della terra ;
 Chè l' un tien l' ombra, e l' altro sol la cria.
 Ma sia che vuol, che pur chi la loda erra ;
 Vedova, scur', in tanta gelosia,
 Ch' una lucciola sol gli può far guerra.

XIX

O NOTT', o dolce tempo benchè nero
 (Con pace ogn' opra sempr' al fin assalta),
 Ben ved' e ben intende chi t' esalta ;
 E chi t' onor', ha l' intellettt' intèro.
 Tu mozzi e tronchi ogni stanco pensiero ;
 Chè l' umid' ombra ogni quiet' appalta :
 E dall' infima parte alla più alta
 In sogno spesso porti ov' ire spero.
 O ombra del morir, per cui s' ferma
 Ogni miseria l' alma al cor nemica,
 Ultimo delli afflitti e buon rimedio ;
 Tu rendi sana nostra carn' inferma,
 Rasciug' i pianti, e posi ogni fatica,
 E furi a chi ben vive ogn' ir' e tedio.

XVIII

WHEN Phœbus hath no mind to strain and press
 Our chilly sphere in his embraces bright,
 His negligence the multitude call Night,
 A name of absence, till he glow again.
 So impotent is she, so weak and vain,
 That kindle up a torch, its petty light
 Doth work her death; and frame she hath so
 slight,
 That flashing of a flint will rend in twain.
 If Night in her own self be anything,
 Call her the daughter of the Earth and Sun,
 The last creating, first receiving shade.
 Be what she may, how glorify a thing
 Widowed, dim-eyed, so easily undone,
 That glowworm's lantern turneth her afraid?

XIX

O NIGHT, O season in thy darkness sweet
 (For every toil falls peaceful to its close),
 He deemeth well who laudeth thy repose,
 And who exalteth, payeth homage meet.
 Thy dewy shade, with quiet falling slow,
 Divides the fret of never-pausing thought;
 From deep of being to the summit brought,
 In dream thou guidst me where I hope to go.
 Shadow of Death, the safe protecting gate
 Barred by the soul against her hunter Grief,
 Of human woe the final, only cure;
 The fever of the blood dost thou abate,
 Dry lingering tears, give weariness relief,
 And anger steal from him who liveth pure.

NON *vider gli occhi miei cosa mortale*
Allor che ne' bei vostri intera pace
Trovai ; ma dentro, ov' ogni mal dispiace,
Chi a' amor l' alma a sè simil m' assale.
E se creata a Dio non fusse eguale,
Altro che 'l bel di fuor, ch' agli occhi piace,
Più non vorria ; ma perch' è sì fallace,
Trascende nella forma universale.
Io dico, ch' a chi vive quel che muore
Quetar non può disir ; nè par s' aspetti
L' eterno al tempo, ove altri cangia il pelo.
Voglia sfrenata el senso è, non amore,
Che l' alma uccide ; e 'l nostro fa perfetti
Gli amici qui, ma più per morte in cielo.

PER *ritornar là donde venne fora,*
L' immortal forma al tuo carcer terreno
Venne com' angel di pietà si pieno
Che sana ogn' intelletto, e 'l mondo onora.
Questo sol m' arde, e questo m' innamora ;
Non pur di fora il tuo volto sereno :
Ch' amor non già di cosa che vien meno
Tien ferma speme, in cu' virtù dimora.
Nè altro avvien di cose altere e nuove
In cui si preme la natura ; e 'l cielo
È ch' a lor parto largo s' apparecchia.
Nè Dio, suo grazia, mi si mostra altrove,
Più che 'n alcun leggiadro e mortal velo ;
E quel sol amo, perchè 'n quel si specchia.

X X

MINE eyes beheld no perishable thing,
 When holy peace I found in orbs of thine,
 And inwardly obtained a hope divine,
 A joy my kindred soul enamoring.
 Unless create God's equal, to receive
 Equality with Him, she might depend
 On shows external; because these deceive,
 Toward universal form she doth transcend.
 Life cannot sate its wishes with decay,
 Nor yet Eternity commandment take
 From years wherein we wither and grow chill;
 'T is lust hath energy the soul to slay,
 Not love, that fain would the beloved make
 Perfect on earth, in heaven, more perfect still.

X X I

ONE day to rise toward height where it began,
 The form immortal to thine earthly cell,
 An angel of compassion, came to dwell
 With balm and healing for the mind of man.
 Such life it is that doth thy life endear,
 And not thy face serene, its envelope;
 In shadows that decline and disappear,
 Immortal Love cannot repose his hope.
 'T is true of all things marvellous and fair,
 Where Nature taketh forethought, and the sky
 Is bountiful in their nativity;
 God's grace doth nowhere else so far prevail
 As where it shineth through a body's veil;
 And that I love, for He is mirrored there.

XXII

SE 'l mie rozzo martello i duri sassi
 Forma d' uman aspetto or questo or quello,
 Dal ministro, ch' el guida iscorgie e tiello
 Prendendo il moto, va con gli altrui passi :
 Ma quel divin, ch' in cielo alberga e stassi,
 Altri, e sè più, col proprio andar fa bello ;
 E se nessun martel senza martello
 Si può far, da quel vivo ogni altro fassi.
 E perchè 'l colpo è di valor più pieno
 Quant' alza più se stesso alla fucina,
 Sopra 'l mie, questo al ciel n' è gito a volo.
 Onde a me non finito verràà meno,
 S' or non gli dà la fabbrica divina
 Aiuto a farlo, c' al mondo era solo.

XXII

*IF my rude hammer lend enduring stone
Similitude of life, being swayed and plied
By arm of one who doth its labor guide,
It moveth with a motion not its own ;
But that on high, which lieth by God's throne,
Itself, and all beside makes beautiful ;
And if no tool be wrought without a tool,
The rest are fashioned by its power alone.
As falls a blow with greater force and heat
The further it descends, for forging mine,
The lifted hammer high as heaven flew ;
Wherefore mine own will never be complete
Unless perfected from the forge divine,
For that which shaped it earth may not renew.*

EPIGRAMMI

I

*CARO m' è 'l sonno, e più l' esser di sasso,
Mentre che 'l danno e la vergogna dura :
Non veder, non sentir, m' è gran ventura ;
Però non mi destar, deb ! parla basso.*

II

*Io dico a voi, ch' al mondo avete dato
L' anima e 'l corpo e lo spirito 'nsieme :
In questa cassa oscura è 'l vostro lato.*

III

*AMORE è un concetto di bellezza
Immaginata, cui sta dentro al core,
Amica di virtute e gentilezza.*

EPIGRAMS

I

ON THE STATUE OF NIGHT IN THE MEDICEAN SACRISTY

SWEET *is to sleep, and marble peace to know,*
Now, *while dishonor and disgrace are near ;*
'T *is all my fortune not to see, nor hear ;*
Therefore *do not awake me ; ah ! speak low !*

II

LINES WRITTEN ON A COFFIN CARRIED BY DEATH

THOU, *thou, who hast bequeathèd to the world*
The spirit and the body and the soul,
Here is thy home, here in this casket dim.

III

LOVE *e'en is an idea, that may express*
Imagined beauty, dwelling in the heart,
A friend of virtue and of gentleness.

MADRIGALI

I

PER molti, donna, anzi per mille amanti,
Creato fusti, e d' angelica forma.
Or par che 'n ciel si dorma,
S' un sol s' apropia quel ch' è dato a tanti.
Ritorna a nostri pianti
Il sol degli occhi tuo', che par che schivi
Chi del suo dono in tal miseria è nato.
Deh! non turbate i vostri desir santi:
Chè chi di me par che vi spogli e privi,
Col gran timor non gode il gran peccato.
Chè degli amanti è men felice stato
Quello, ove 'l gran desir gran copia affrena,
C' una miseria di speranza piena.

MADRIGALS

I

FLORENTINE EXILES

FOR *many, for a thousand lovers, thou,*
Lady, wert made of form angelical.
Asleep, perchance, lie sealèd heavens now,
While one enjoyeth grant designed for all.
Ah render to our sighs
The sunlight of thine eyes,
That shunneth him, who into sorrow born,
Doth languish of their benefit forlorn!

THE CITY OF FLORENCE

NAY, *calm your holy aspiration; know*
That he who maketh you my boon forego,
In fear doth expiate his mighty crime.
And aye with lovers sadder is the time,
When love expireth of satiety,
Than while aboundeth hope in misery.

II

NON sempre al mondo è sì pregiato e caro
 Quel che molti contenta,
 Che non sie 'lcun che senta,
 Quel ch' è lor dolce, spesse volte amaro.
 Il buon gusto è sì raro,
 Ch' a forza al vulgo cede,
 Allor che dentro di se stesso gode.
 Ond' io, perdendo, imparo
 Quel che di fuor non vede
 Chi l' alma attrista e' suo' sospir non ode.
 Il mondo è cieco, e di suo' gradi o lode
 Più giova a chi più scarso esser ne suole:
 Come sferza che 'nsegna, e parte duole.

III

PERCHÈ è troppo molesta,
 Ancor che dolce sia,
 La grazia c' altru' fa preda e prigionie;
 Mie libertà, per questa
 Tuo somma cortesia,
 Più che d' un furto al vero amor s' oppone.
 Di par passi è ragione:
 Ma se l' un dà più che l' altro non dona,
 È ben giusta quistione;
 Che l' un sormonta, e l' altro non perdona.

II

HOWEVER *worship-worthy and complete*
Be deemed a work that many lovers know,
May live the man who doth not find it so,
Deriving bitter from the lauded sweet.
Taste is so rare, a thing so isolate,
That from the multitude it must recede,
Alone upon internal joy to feed;
Wherefore in self retired, and passionate,
I see what vieweth not the outer eye,
Cold to the soul and heedless of her sigh.
The world is blind, and from its praises vain
He learneth most who freest doth remain,
Suffers, and bath a lesson in his pain.

III

'T IS *burdensome, however it be sweet,*
The friendly boon that doth oblige the friend;
My liberty, thy courtesy to meet,
Worse than if robbed, doth with true love con-
tend.
The soul of friendship is equality;
If friend more freely than his fellow give,
Ariseth rivalry;
The first excelleth, last doth not forgive.

I V

ORA in sul destro, ora in sul manco piede
Variando, cerco della mia salute :
Fra 'l vizio e la virtute
Il cor confuso mi travaglia e stanca ;
Come chi 'l ciel non vede,
Che per ogni sentier si perde, e manca.
Porgo la carta bianca
A' vostri sacri inchiostri,
Ch' amor mi sganni, e pietà 'l ver ne scriva :
Che l' alma da sè franca
Non pieghi a gli error nostri
Mio breve resto, e che men cieco viva.
Chieggo a voi, alta e diva
Donna, saper se 'n ciel men grado tiene
L' umil peccato che 'l superchio bene.

I V

A PILGRIM *seeking my salvation still,*
From foot to foot I change,
As wearily I range
Quite indeterminate 'twixt good and ill,
A stumbling farer-by,
Who, viewless of the sky,
Doth lose his way and wander at his will.
The white and vacant leaf
Inscribe with word of thine ;
Let love and pity come to my relief,
And liberate my soul
From dark and doubt-control
For petty period that yet is mine.
Lady, I ask thy saintliness divine,
If heaven on high a lower seat provide
For shamefast sin, than virtue satisfied?

GLI occhi miei vaghi delle cose belle,
 E l' alma insieme della sua salute,
 Non hanno altra virtute
 Ch' ascenda al ciel, che mirar tutte quelle.
 Dalle più alte stelle
 Discende uno splendore,
 Che 'l desir tira a quelle ;
 E qui si chiama amore.
 Nè altro ha gentil core,
 Che l' innamorì e arda, e che 'l consigli,
 Ch' un volto che ne gli occhi lor somigli.

SE dal cor lieto divien bello il volto,
 Dal tristo il brutto ; e se donna aspra e bella
 Il fa, chi fie ma' quella
 Che non ardi di me, com' io di lei ?
 Po' c' a destinguer molto
 Dalla mie chiara stella
 Da bello a bel fur fatti gli occhi mei ;
 Contra sè fa costei
 Non men crudel, che spesso
 Dichì : dal cor mie, smorto il volto viene.
 Che s' altri fa se stesso,
 Pingendo donna ; in quella
 Che farà po' se sconsolato tiene ?
 Dunc' anbo n' arie bene,
 Ritrarla col cor lieto e 'l viso asciutto ;
 Sè farie bella, e me non farie brutto.

V

MY glances pleased with everything that's fair,
 My soul inclined toward her celestial gain,
 Devoid of power high heaven to attain,
 Can find no way, save only gazing there.
 Stars loftiest above
 A radiancy lend,
 Bidding desire ascend;
 That light is here named Love.
 Nor gentle heart hath any other friend
 To fortify, enamor, and advise,
 Than countenance with star-resembling eyes.

VI

IF happy heart make beautiful the face,
 But sad heart foul; and for a lady's sake
 Be born the cause that such effect doth make,
 How hath she courage for refusing grace
 To me, whose birth-star bright
 Accordeth the clear sight
 That rightly chooseth between fair and fair?
 Sure she who hath my mind
 Proves to herself unkind,
 My feature if she render full of care;
 For if in likeness shown
 A painter leaves his own,
 Small loveliness can wait
 On labor of a hand disconsolate.
 Then let her please to favor mine estate,
 That I may paint blithe heart and smiling eye;
 She will grow fair, and not unlovely I.

VII

NEGLI *anni molti e nelle molte pruove,*
Cercando, il saggio al buon concetto arriva
D' un' immagine viva,
Vicino a morte, in pietra alpestra e dura :
C' all' alte cose e nuove
Tardi si viene, e poco poi si dura.
Similmente natura
Di tempo in tempo, d' uno in altro volto,
S' al sommo, errando, di bellezza è giunta
Nel tuo divino, è vecchia, e de' perire.
Onde la tema, molto
Con la beltà congiunta,
Di stranio cibo pasce il gran desire :
Nè so pensar, nè dire,
Qual nuoca o giovi più, visto 'l tuo 'spetto,
O 'l fin dell' universo, o 'l gran diletto.

VIII

Sì come per levar, donna, si pone
 In pietra alpestra e dura
 Una viva figura,
 Che là più cresce u' più la pietra scema ;
 Tal alcun' opre buone,
 Per l' alma che pur trema,
 Cela il superchio della propria carne
 Co l' inculta sua cruda e dura scorza.
 Tu pur dalle mie streme
 Parti puo' sol levarne ;
 Ch' in me non è di me voler nè forza.

VII

YEAR after year, essay beyond essay,
 Seeking, the lessoned maker doth arrive
 At the idea, he leaveth aye alive
 In alpine marble, though his life be flown;
 For only in the twilight of his day
 He reacheth what is noble and his own.
 Thus Nature, long astray
 From age to age, from face to fairer face,
 Hath finally achieved thy perfect grace,
 When she herself is old, and near her end.
 Therein I find to dwell
 A fear, that with thy loveliness doth blend,
 And my desire toward passion strange compel;
 I cannot think or tell,
 If sweet or painful be thy beauty bright,
 The world's conclusion, or my love-delight.

VIII

IN mountain-marble white,
 Doth hide a statue bright,
 That waxeth ever while the rock doth wane;
 E'en so from flesh-control
 The timid trembling soul
 Mine inward fair would liberate in vain.
 Lady, I look to thee
 Alone to set me free,
 For in myself doth will nor power remain.

SE d' una pietra viva
 L' arte vuol che qui viva
 Al par degli anni il volto di costei ;
 Che dovria il ciel di lei,
 Sendo mie questa, e quella suo fattura ;
 Nè già mortal, ma diva,
 Non solo a gli occhi mei ?
 E pur si parte, e picciol tempo dura.
 Dal lato destro è zoppa mie ventura,
 S' un sasso resta, e costè' morte affretta.
 Chi ne farà vendetta ?
 Natura sol, se de' suo' nati sola
 L' opra qua dura, e la suo 'l tempo invola.

NON pur d' argento o d' oro,
 Vinto dal foco, esser po' piena aspetta
 Vota d' opra perfetta
 La forma, che sol fratta il tragge fora :
 Tal io, col foco ancora
 D' amor dentro ristoro
 Il desir voto di beltà infinita,
 Di costei ch' i' adoro,
 Anima e cor della mie fragil vita.
 Alta donna e gradita
 In me discende per si brevi spazi,
 C' a trarla fora, convien mi rompa e strazi.

I X

IN *alpine stone and pure*
 If art may bid endure
 Her countenance as long as summers flow ;
 What period should heaven on her bestow,
 Its own creation, radiant and free,
 For others, as for me ?
 And yet is she with fading life endued.
 My Fortune then in her best foot is lame,
 If Death the substance, Life the semblance claim.
 On whom devolves the feud ?
 On Nature's self, if of her sons alone
 The work survive, and Time despoil her own.

X

FOR *silver or for gold,*
 After in fire these have been made to flow,
 Doth wait the empty mould,
 That shattered, will the lovely image show ;
 Through passion-ardor, so
 My vacancy I store
 With the divine unbounded loveliness
 Of her whom I adore,
 The soul and essence of my fragileness,
 Whose beauty doth inpour,
 And occupy by passages so strait,
 That broken I must be to liberate.

XI

BEATI, voi che su nel ciel godete
 Le lacrime che 'l mondo non ristora,
 Favvi amor guerra ancora,
 O pur per morte liberi ne siete?
 La nostra eterna quiete,
 Fuor d' ogni tempo, è priva
 D' invidia amando, e d' angosciosi pianti.
 Dunche a mal pro ch' i' viva
 Convien, come vedete,
 Per amare e servire in dolor tanti.
 Se 'l cielo è degli amanti
 Amico, e 'l mondo ingrato
 Amando, a che son nato?
 A viver molto? E questo mi spaventa:
 Chè 'l poco è troppo a chi ben serve e stenta.

XII

NON pur la morte, ma 'l timor di quella
 Da donna iniqua e bella,
 Ch' ogn' or' m' ancide, mi difende e scampa:
 E se tal' or m' avvampa
 Più che 'l usato il foco in ch' io son corso,
 Non trovo altro soccorso
 Che l' imagin sua ferma in mezzo il core;
 Che dove è morte non s' appressa amore.

X I

“ O BLESSED spirits, who in world's release
 Are recompensed for tears it could not pay,
 Tell me if Love wage war on you alway,
 Or Death hath yonder made his quarrel cease? ”

“ Our everlasting peace,
 All time beyond, here loveth unacquaint
 With mortal lovers' sorrow and complaint.”

“ Then sad it is for me
 To linger, as you see,
 Loving and serving where my heart doth faint.
 If Heaven be lovers' friend,
 And Earth their anguish lend,
 Need I live long? The thought doth cause me
 fear ;
 To wistful lover minutes years appear.”

X I I

NOT Death alone, but his indwelling dread
 Doth succor and set free
 From sway of one unjust as cherishèd,
 Who constantly doth make assault on me ;
 As oft as flameth with unwonted force
 The fire that folds me, I have no resource
 Save keep his image central in the heart ;
 Where Death abides, Love hath not any part.

XIII

S' EGLI è che 'l buon desio
Porti dal mondo a Dio
Alcuna cosa bella,
Sol la mie donna è quella,
A chi ha gli occhi fatti com' ho io.
Ogni altra cosa oblio,
E sol di tant' ho cura.
Non è gran maraviglia,
S' io l' amo e bramo e chiamo a tutte l' ore :
N' è proprio valor mio,
Se l' alma per natura
S' appoggia a chi somiglia
Ne gli occhi gli occhi, ond' ella scende fore ;
Se sente il primo Amore
Come suo fin, per quel qua questa onora :
Ch' amar diè 'l servo ch' el signore adora.

XIII

*If any beauteous thing
 Can human hope exalt to God on high,
 For one who hath the vision made as I,
 Alone my lady may like comfort bring ;
 Wherefore it is not strange,
 If from the rest I range
 To love her, to pursue and supplicate ;
 'T is Nature's law, not mine,
 That bids the soul incline
 Toward eyes reminding of its first estate,
 Whereby it hath recourse
 To its own end and source,
 The primal Love, that her with beauty storeth ;
 He loves the vassal, who the lord adoreth.*

XIV

QUANTUNCHE *ver sia, che l' alta e divina*
Pietà qui mostri il tuo bel volto umano ;
Donna, il piacer lontano
M' è tardi sì, che dal tuo non mi parto :
C' all' alma pellegrina
Gli è duro ogn' altro sentiero erto e arto.
Ond' il tempo comparto,
Per gli occhi il giorno e per la notte il core ;
A l' acque l' uno, a l' altro il foco ardente ;
Senz' intervallo alcun, ch' al cielo aspiri.
Dal destinato parto
Si mi ti dette amore,
Ch' alzar non oso i mie' ardenti desiri ;
Se 'l ver non è, che tiri
La mente al ciel per grazia o per mercede :
Tardi ama il cor quel l' occhio non vede.

XIV

THOUGH true it be, that Charity divine
 Show mirrored in yon lovely face of thine,
 Yet, lady, moves the distant hope so slow,
 That from thy beauty I lack power to go;
 The pilgrim soul, that would with thee delay,
 Finds rough and stern the strait and narrow
 way.

My time I therefore part,
 To eyes give day, and darkness to the heart,
 To last the water, and to first the fire,
 No interval, toward heaven to aspire.
 A destiny of birth
 Enchained me to the earth
 In grant of thee, save mercy of the sky
 Please to descend, and lift my heart on high;
 Heart will not love what looks cannot espy.

XV

A l' alta tuo lucente diadema
 Per la strada erta e lunga
 Non è, donna, chi giunga,
 S' umiltà non v' aggiugni e cortesia :
 Il montar cresce, e 'l mie valore scema ;
 E la lena mi manca a mezza via.
 Che tuo beltà pur sia
 Superna, al cor par che diletto renda,
 Che d' ogni rara altezza è giotto e vago :
 Po' per gioir della tuo leggiadria,
 Bramo pur che discenda
 La dov' aggiungo : e 'n tal pensier m' appago,
 Se 'l tuo sdegnio presago,
 Per basso amare e alto odiar tuo stato,
 A te stessa perdona il mie peccato.

XVI

DEH ! dimmi, amor, se l' alma di costei
 Fosse pietosa com' ha bell' il volto,
 S' alcun saria sì stolto
 Ch' a sè non si toglieffi e dessi a lei ?
 Et io che più potrei
 Servirla, amarla, se mi foss' amica ;
 Che, sendomi nemica,
 L' amo più ch' allor far non doverrei ?

XV

THY lucent-crownèd beauty to attain
 Upon a narrow and laborious way,
 The pilgrim vainly maketh his essay,
 Save thy humility his feet forestall;
 The path aspireth while the strength doth wane,
 And midway on the road I pant and fall.
 Although thy loveliness celestiál
 Be heaven's thing, yet aye it doth delight
 The heart inclined toward stranger of the
 height;
 Wherefore thy sweetness full to comprehend,
 I long to have thee stoop, and condescend
 As low as I, of the idea content,
 If thy disdain severe and prescient
 Itself forgive for sinfulness of mine,
 To love thee lowly, and to hate divine.

XVI

AH tell me, Love, had she a heart as kind
 As beauty that her feature doth partake,
 Could there be found the wretch so dull and
 blind,
 That would not choose himself from self to take,
 And give to her? Yet even if she grew
 My loving friend, what more could I bestow,
 When in her coldness, while she seems my foe,
 I love her better than I else could do?

XVII

COME può esser ch' io non sia più mio?
 O dio, o dio, o dio!
 Chi mi tolse a me stesso,
 Ch' a me fusse più presso,
 O più di me, che mi possa esser io?
 O dio, o dio, o dio!
 Come mi passa 'l core
 Chi non par che mi tocchi!
 Che cosa è questa, amore,
 Ch' al core entra per gli occhi;
 E s' avvien che trabocchi
 Per poco spazio, dentro par che cresca?

XVIII

OGNI cosa ch' i' veggio mi consiglia,
 E prega, e forza ch' io vi segua et ami;
 Chè quel che non e voi, non è il mio bene.
 Amor, che sprezza ogni altra maraviglia,
 Per mia salute vuol ch' io cerchi e brami
 Voi sole solo: e così l' alma tiene
 D' ogni alta spene e d' ogni valor priva;
 E vuol ch' io arda e viva
 Non sol di voi, ma chi di voi somiglia
 Degli occhi e delle ciglia alcuna parte.
 E chi da voi si parte,
 Occhi mia vita, non ha luce poi;
 Chè 'l ciel non è dove non sete voi.

XVII

How came to pass that I am mine no more?
Ah me!

Who took myself from me
To draw more close to me
Than ever I could be,
More dearly mine, than I myself before?
Ah me!

How reached he to the heart
Touching no outward part?
Who prithee may Love be,
That entered at the eyes,
And if in breathèd sighs
He go abroad, increaseth inwardly?

XVIII

ALL Nature urgently doth me advise,
Implore, compel, to follow thee, and cling
To my sole blessed thing.
Love, who doth other loveliness despise,
To make me seek salvation only here,
Doth in my heart destroy
Desire of other joy,
And only measure of delight allow
In beauty semblant to thine eye and brow;
Yet being no longer near
To you, clear eyes, its light hath ceased to shine,
For only where you dwell is heaven of mine.

XIX

CHI è quel che per forza a te mi mena,
 Ohimè ohimè ohimè!
 Legato e stretto, e son libero e sciolto?
 Se tu 'ncateni altrui senza catena,
 E senza mani o braccia m' hai raccolto,
 Chi mi difenderà dal tuo bel volto?

XX

SE 'l comodo de gli occhi alcun constringe
 Con l' uso, parte insieme
 La ragion perde, e teme;
 Che più s' inganna quel ch' a sè più crede:
 Onde nel cor dipinge
 Per bello quel a picciol beltà cede.
 Ben vi fo, donna, fede
 Che 'l comodo nè 'l uso non m' ha preso,
 Sì di raro e mie' veggion gli occhi vostri
 Circonstritti ov' a pena il desir vola.
 Un punto sol m' ha acceso;
 Nè più vi vidi ch' una volta sola.

XIX

WHO theeward draws me, spite my striving
vain?

Ah woe is me!

Am I at once imprisonèd and free?

If thou dost chain me without any chain,
And handless, armless, all my life embrace,
Who shall defend me from thy lovely face?

XX

If habit of the eyes engender ease,

Faint Reason on her way

Feareth to go astray,

Lest inwardly she taketh

For beauty fair, what beauty quite forsaketh.

Lady, it doth appear

That ease and custom have not made you dear,

For that my looks are foreign to your own,

Toward whose confìne my wishes dare not soar;

I was inflamèd in a breath alone;

Your feature I have gazed on once, no more.

XXI

UN uomo in una donna, anzi uno dio,
 Per la sua bocca parla:
 Ond' io per ascoltarla
 Son fatto tal, che ma' più sarò mio.
 I' credo ben, po' ch' io
 A me da lei fu tolto,
 Fuor di me stesso aver di me pietate:
 Si sopra 'l van desio
 Mi sprona il suo bel volto,
 Ch' io veggio morte in ogn' altra beltate.
 O donna, che passate
 Per acqua e foco l' alme a' lieti giorni,
 Deh fate ch' a me stesso più non torni!

XXII

Io dico che fra noi, potenti dei,
 Convien ch' ogni riverso si sopporti!
 Poi che sarete morti
 Di mille 'ngiurie e torti,
 Amando te com' or di lei tu ardi,
 Far ne potrai giustamente vendetta.
 Ahimè lasso chi pur tropp' aspetta
 Ch' i' gionga a' suoi conforti tanto tardi!
 Ancor, se ben riguardi,
 Un generoso alter' e nobil core
 Perdon', e porta a chi l' offend' amore.

XXI

THOUGHTS of a man, nay of a god alone,
 Her lips of woman render eloquent;
 Whence I, who listen purely with content,
 May nevermore depart and be mine own.
 Since she my life hath taken,
 And self have I forsaken,
 I pity self that I was wont to be.
 From wavering will astray
 Her fair face maketh free,
 Till other beauty death appears to me.
 Thou, who dost souls convey
 To Paradise through chastening fire and wave,
 Lest I to self return, dear lady, save!

XXII

FLORENTINE EXILE

O'ER us, I think, divinities on high!
 Impendeth every shameful overthrow!

MICHELANGELO

Albeit thou underlie
 A thousand deaths of injury and woe,
 A period will be,
 When loved by her as she is loved by thee,
 Thou mayest the sweet of lawful vengeance know.

FLORENTINE EXILE

Alas! for aye aweary doth he dwell,
 Who waiteth for his comfort coming slow!
 And perfect truth to tell,
 A generous heart, of proud nobility,
 Forgiveth, and doth love its enemy.

X X I I I

S' ALCUNA parte in donna è che sia bella,
 Benchè l' altre sian brutte,
 Debb' io amarle tutte
 Pel gran piacer ch' io prendo sol di quella?
 La parte che s' appella,
 Mentre il gioir n' attrista,
 A la ragion, pur vuole
 Che l' innocente error si scusi e ami.
 Amor, che mi favella
 Della noiosa vista,
 Com' irato dir suole,
 Che nel suo regno non s' attenda o chiami.
 E 'l ciel pur vuol ch' io brami
 A quel che spiace non sia pietà vana ;
 Chè 'l uso agli occhi ogni malfatto sana.

X X I V

MESTIER non era all' alma tuo beltate
 Legarme vinto con alcuna corda ;
 Che, se ben mi ricorda,
 Sol d' uno sguardo fui prigione e preda :
 C' alle gran doglie usate
 Forz' è c' un debil cor subito ceda.
 Ma chi fie ma' che creda,
 Preso da' tuo' begli occhi in brevi giorni
 Un legnio secco e arso verde torni ?

XXIII

IF *that she own a feature passing fair,*
While void of happy liking live the rest,
Ought I affection toward the whole to bear,
For sake of beauty by the one possessed?
The lovely part, distrest,
My praise doth deprecate,
And sue to Reason for her sisters' sake,
That also they be cherished, and forgiven
For fault they did not mean. Then Love, irate,
Who thinketh but on pain that they have given,
Saith, in his court there lieth no appeal.
Yet Heaven willeth fondness that I feel,
When toward her imperfection merciful,
Time maketh her, for me, all beautiful.

XXIV

THY *sweetness had no need of cord or chain*
Its prisoner to bind;
Too well I bear in mind,
How I was conquered by a glance alone;
The heart subdued by many an ancient pain
Hath lost the fortitude it erst did own.
Yet who hath ever known,
That wakened by a look, in time so brief,
A withered tree should kindle and bear leaf?

X X V

AMOR, se tu se' dio,
 Non puo' ciò che tu vuoi?
 Deh fa' per me, se puoi,
 Quel ch' io farei per te, s' amor fuss' io!
 Sconviensi al gran desio
 D' alta beltà la speme,
 Viepiù l' effetto, a chi è presso al morire.
 Pon nel tuo grado il mio:
 Dolce gli fie chi 'l preme?
 Chè grazia per poc' or, doppia 'l martire.
 Ben ti voglio ancor dire:
 Che sarie morte, s' a' miseri è dura,
 A chi muor giunto all' alta sua ventura?

X X V

" O LOVE, thou art divine,
 A god to work thy will ;
 Prithee, for me fulfil
 All I would do for thee, if deity were mine."
 " He were no friend of thine,
 Who hope of lofty beauty should bestow
 On one who presently must life forego ;
 Come put thee in my place,
 Thy idle prayer retrace ;
 Wilt thou implore a gain,
 That granted, only would enlarge the pain ?
 Death hath a sober face ;
 If even the unhappy find him rude,
 How stern to one arrived at full beatitude ? "

NOTES ON THE SONNETS
EPIGRAMS AND
MADRIGALS



NOTES ON THE
SONNETS

The Roman numbers, in the Introduction and Notes, refer to the numeration of Guasti (Le Rime di Michelangelo Buonarroti, Florence, 1863).

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE POEMS.—On the corrupted texts of 1623 were based the versions of J. E. Taylor (Michael Angelo considered as a Philosophic Poet. With Translations. London, 1840), and of J. S. Harford (Life of Michael Angelo Buonarroti. With Translations of many of his Poems and Letters. London, 1857). The beautiful renderings of Wordsworth (five sonnets) depended on the same faulty presentation. The correct texts of Guasti were followed by J. A. Symonds in his complete translation of the sonnets (The Sonnets of Michael Angelo Buonarroti and Tommasi Campanella. London, 1878). In his biography of the sculptor (The Life of Michael-Angelo Buonarroti. London, 1893), Symonds rendered several of the madrigals. A selection

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from the poems, with the Italian text, and renderings by different hands, was edited by Mrs. E. D. Cheney (Selected Poems from Michael-Angelo Buonarroti. With Translations from various sources. Boston, 1885). This publication includes thirteen epitaphs for Cecchino Bracchi, and the verses written by Michelangelo on the death of his father, as well as a number of the sonnets of the last period (after 1547). Versions of single sonnets may be found scattered through periodical literature.

I [1] Donato Giannotti wrote an essay concerning the duration of the journey through Hell and Purgatory, as related in the "Divina Commedia." This discussion he cast into the form of a dialogue, in which Michelangelo is given the principal part; the conversation is dated as taking place in 1545, and one of the interlocutors is made to recite the sonnet which, with doubtful accuracy, is said to have been composed a few days before. The work of Giannotti is interesting as containing the estimate of a contemporary concerning the character of Michelangelo, but the words assigned to him cannot be considered as a record of his actual expressions. The essayist seems to have applied to the artist for material, as indicated by the subscription of the following sonnet, probably composed at this time.

[II]

QUANTE DIRNE SI DE' NON SI PUÒ DIRE

His *praise remains unuttered, for his fire*
Of glory burneth with o'erivivid flame ;
The home that wronged him easier to blame,
Than toward his humblest merit to aspire.
This man for us descended, where God's ire
Subdueth sin, once more toward heaven rose ;
The gates that his Creator did not close,
A cruel city barred to his desire.
Ab ruthless mother, nurse of her own woe,
In measure as her sons are excellent,
Their sorrow making bitterly to flow !
Of thousand instances one argument ;
No man hath lived more shamefully exiled,
No age hath known a like, a greater child.

2 [XIV] The sketch, characterized by rude vigor, lacks the truth and harmony essential to a beautiful work; these qualities are to be attained by the final touches of the hammer, or, as we should now say, of the chisel. So it is only the influence of the beloved person which can perfect the incomplete design of Nature, and bestow on the character its final excellence. Of all the sonnets, this is the most celebrated.

Respecting an inferior variant, the younger Buonarroti, in an obscure mention, appears to say that it was contained in a letter of the

sculptor written in 1550, which letter made mention of the marchioness of Pescara; and this assertion has led Guasti to refer the sonnet to that date. It is quite clear, however, that the treatment does not belong to the later period, after the death of Vittoria Colonna, in which the productions of Michelangelo had assumed the monotone of a colorless piety. It seems to me more likely that the time of composition is to be set earlier than 1534, and that the conception, ideal in character, had no relation to Vittoria, with whom the sculptor had perhaps not yet become acquainted.

3 [xv] The sculptor, who is designated as the best of artists, on beholding the block of marble at his disposal, obtains the suggestion of a statue; this possible work appears to him as a figure concealed beneath the veil of superincumbent matter, which he proceeds to remove. His success will depend on the clearness of internal vision; if he lack the vivid conception, the result will be an abortive product, which metaphorically may be called a likeness of Death. So if the lover, in place of the "mercy" which he desires to awaken, can create in the heart of his lady only a feeling inconsistent with his wishes, the blame should be laid solely to his own insufficiency. The idea is poetic, not philosophic, and the sonnet a poem of love,

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belonging to what I have called the earlier manner of the poet. The sonnet has been paraphrased by Emerson : —

NEVER *did sculptor's dream unfold*
A form which marble doth not hold
In its white block ; yet it therein shall find
Only the hand secure and bold
Which still obeys the mind.
So hide in thee, thou heavenly dame,
The ill I shun, the good I claim ;
I, alas ! not well alive,
Miss the aim whereto I strive.
Not love, nor beauty's pride,
Nor fortune, nor thy coldness can I chide,
If whilst within thy heart abide
Both death and pity, my unequal skill
Fails of the life, but draws the death and ill.

In this rendering the fourth line is open to criticism ; it is not want of manual skill that is the cause of failure, but the inability to form an adequate idea. Harford modernizes the introductory lines : —

WHATE'ER *conception a great artist fires,*
Its answering semblance latent lies within
A block of marble.

The metaphor is thus reduced to the scholastic platitude, that in all matter lies the potentiality of form. So Varchi understood

the lines, and cites Aristotle as authority that the action of an agent is nothing but the extraction of a thing from potency to act; with changes on such intolerable jargon he occupies two pages. The lecture, intended to be flattering, only serves to show with what contemporary crassness the delicate conceptions of Michelangelo were obliged to struggle.

4 [xvii] The contrast between the permanence of the artistic product and the transitoriness of the mortal subject suggests reflections which may take different turns. (See madrigal No. 9 [xiii].) One is reminded of certain sonnets of Shakespeare.

5 [xix] The lover feels himself enriched by the impression of the beloved, which, like the divine name on the seal of Solomon, confers the power of working miracles. The pretty composition is among the few which may be said to be inspired by a really cheerful and joyous sentiment, and, like the preceding, may be held to belong to the earlier manner of the poet.

6 [xx] This most beautiful sonnet, somewhat immature in its music, is a precious relic of Michelangelo's early love verse. The poem was written below a letter from his father, received in Bologna, and dated 24 December, 1507. Subscribed is the line: *La m' arde e lega et emmi*

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e parmi un zucchero. "She burns me and binds me and eats me, and I think her a sugarplum." The lines, therefore, have a biographic inspiration, and may be presumed to have been in honor of some young beauty of Bologna. A fragment of a madrigal seems akin.

[CII]

LEZZI, vezzi, carezze, or feste e perle ;
 Chi potria ma' vederle
 Cogli atti suo' divin l' uman lavoro,
 Ove l' argento e l' oro
 Da le' ricieve o duplica suo luce ?
 Ogni gemma più luce
 Dagli occhi suo' che da propia virtute.

"LOOKS, laughter, graces, gaud, and pearl ;
 Who that gazeth on the girl
 Ever hath a thought to spare
 For the gold that gleameth there,
 Or if silver sparkle fair ?
 Every gem that on her lies
 Borroweth lustre from her eyes."

In this connection also should be cited the sonnet which Guasti has placed next in order, and which also seems to contain internal evidence of belonging to a period relatively early.

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[XXI]

D' ALTRUI PIETOSO E SOL DI SÈ SPIETATO

*To others kind, and only self-oppressed,
 Doth live a lowly worm, that to adorn
 A lady's beauty will her life divest,
 In death alone appearing nobly born.
 So would my lady might esteem no scorn
 Her life in my mortality to vest,
 That I might shed this slough, and be re-born
 Forth from my being to a state more blest.
 Would that of me the silken thread were twined,
 That fashioned to her happy gown, doth use
 So fair a bosom with content to bind,
 By day at least to wear me; or the shoes,
 That like the column's base, her steps sustain,
 If only in the falling of the rain!*

It would seem that these remains of the poetical activity of early manhood, though not numerous, are yet sufficient to refute the rash generalizations of biographers who undertake to sum up the personality from their impressions of the artistic product. It does seem strange that with these lines before him, Mr. Symonds could have written: "Michelangelo emerges as a mighty master who was dominated by the vision of male beauty, and who saw the female mainly through the fascination of the other sex. The defect of his

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art is due to a certain constitutional callousness, a want of sensuous or imaginative sensibility for what is specifically feminine. . . . Michelangelo neither loved nor admired nor yielded to the female sex. . . . I find it difficult to resist the conclusion that Michelangelo felt himself compelled to treat women as though they were another and less graceful sort of males. What he did not comprehend and could not represent was woman in her girlishness, her youthful joy, her physical attractions, her magic of seduction. . . . What makes Michelangelo's crudity in his plastic treatment of the female form the more remarkable is that in his poetry he seems to feel the influence of women mystically. I shall have to discuss this topic in another place. It is enough here to say that, with very few exceptions, we remain in doubt whether he is addressing a woman at all. There are none of those spontaneous utterances by which a man involuntarily expresses the outgoings of his heart to a beloved object, the throb of irresistible emotion, the physical ache, the sense of wanting, the joys and pains, the hopes and fears, which belong to genuine passion. . . . Michelangelo's 'donna' might just as well be a man; and indeed, the poems he addressed to men, though they have nothing sensual about them, reveal a finer

touch in the emotion of the writer." (Life, vol. i, c. vi, 8. See vol. ii, pp. 381-5.)

The reasons for the limitation which may have prevented Michelangelo from adequately representing the sensuous aspect of womanhood, should be sought in the character of his plastic genius. So far as the power of appreciation is concerned, and especially in regard to the spirit of the verse, the opinion of Mr. Symonds appears to me to reverse the fact. The nature of the artist may be pronounced especially sensitive to the physical influence of woman. If, in the extant poetry, this sentiment appears in chastened form, such calmness may be set down solely to the period of life. Yet even in these later compositions, extreme impressibility is revealed in every line. Mr. Symonds's error has prevented him from entering into the spirit of the sonnets, and also constitutes a deficiency in his instructive biography. (See note to sonnet No. 13 [xxx].)

7 [xxii] The verse, direct and passionate, though doubtless of a later date, still bears the character of pieces which must be pronounced relatively early. Observable is the use of theologic metaphor, employed only for the sake of poetic coloring, and not yet sublimed to pure thought.

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8 [xxiv] This delightful sonnet, according to the nephew, was found on a letter bearing date of 1529. (See p. 7.) The lines seem to give the idea of a gentle and lovely personage whose countenance shines out as through a golden mist. In later compositions, the conflict of Death and Love is worked out differently. (See madrigal No. 9 [xiii].)

9 [xxv] On the same authority, this inexpressibly charming production is assigned to 1529. Here appear the germs of Platonic imagination. The soul, a divine essence, endows the visible suggestion with the spiritual essence derived from its own store. But the object is not completely divinized; the end is still possession. The reflective element will increase, the sensuous lessen, until poetry passes over into piety.

10 [xxvii] The love verse is not to be taken as wholly biographic, but rather as ideal.

11 [xxviii] The atmosphere of the sonnet is that of later time and of a more rarefied height. We are now in full Platonism. The soul, heaven-born, perceives in the eyes of the beloved its primal home, the Paradise whence itself has descended, and the heavenly affection of which earthly love is a reminiscence. But the period may still be before the Roman residence, and the meeting with Vittoria Colonna.

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12 [XXIX] This sonnet may safely be set down as belonging to the later time. The sentiment of unhappy attachment, impossible desire, wistful loneliness, breathes through the verse. The piece contains two mystical but grand lines. Whoever has hoped for an elevation not given to mortals has wasted his thought in the endeavor to penetrate the recesses of deity, as seed is lost on the stony ground, and words spent in the limitless air.

13 [XXX] This gentle and tender poem, of the earlier period, somewhat similar in sentiment to No. 5 [XIX], and obviously from the heart, is penetrated by the same feeling as that discernible in Nos. 8 and 9 [XXIV and XXV]. Varchi, with his characteristic want of perception, chose to fancy that it might be addressed to a man, like the following, said to be composed for Tommaso Cavalieri.

[XXXI]

A CHE PIÙ DEBB' IO MAI L' INTENSA VOGLIA

*WHAT right have I to give my passion vent
In bitter plaint and words of sighing breath,
If Heaven, soon or late, apparelleth
Each living soul in mantle of lament?
Why ere his time, invoke the feet of Death,
When Death will come? Nay, rather let my
glance*

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*At last dwell peaceful on his countenance,
 Since other good my sorrow vanquisheth.
 Yet if no power is mine to shun the blow
 I court and seek; what help will be my own,
 To interpose 'twixt dolor and delight?
 Since prison and defeat allure me so,
 It is not strange, if naked and alone,
 I remain captive of an armèd knight.*

The words *cavalier armato* are supposed to have referred to the aforesaid Cavalieri, a Roman youth whom Varchi describes as all that was beautiful and lovable. The highest male beauty seems to have had for Italians of the Renaissance an attraction similar to that which it possessed for Athenians, a charm which our modern taste does not entirely comprehend. Thus the early death of Cecchino Bracchi had produced a great sensation; the epitaphs addressed to his memory by Michelangelo, who had never looked on his face, attest the sincerity of his own sentiment. For Cavalieri, whom the artist had known in 1533, he seems to have felt what can be described only as a passion; the three extant letters addressed to the young man breathe that timidity, sense of inferiority, and fear of misunderstanding which ordinarily belong only to sexual attachment. This emotion needs no apology other than that contained in a letter to this friend: "And if you are sure of my

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affection, you ought to think and know that he who loveth remembereth, and can no more forget the things he fervently loves, than a hungry man the food that nourishes him; nay, much less may one forget beloved objects than the food on which man liveth; for they nourish both soul and body, the last with the greatest sobriety, and the first with tranquil felicity and the expectation of everlasting salvation." (Lettere, No. 4, 16.) The susceptibility of Michelangelo toward external impressions is noted by Giannotti, who makes him affirm that as often as he set eyes on any person endowed with excellence he could not help becoming enamored of him in such manner that he surrendered himself to him as a prey. (Guasti, Rime, p. xxxi.) To the point is Michelangelo's own estimate of his character expressed in a sonnet.

[xviii]

AL COR DI ZOLFO, ALLA CARNE DI STOPPA

*'THE heart of sulphur and the flesh of tow,
The bones inflammable as tinder dried,
The soul without a bridle, without guide,
In liking prompt, toward joy o'erswift to go,
The reason purblind, halting, lame, and slow,
Tangled in nets wherewith the world doth teem,
No marvel 't is, if even in a gleam*

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*I kindle up in flame that first doth glow.
 With that fair art endowed, whereby the mind
 From heaven that bringeth, Nature doth outvie,
 And with itself all being occupy,
 If I thereto was born nor deaf nor blind,
 Proportionate to heat that I desire,
 'T is fault of him who made for me the fire.*

It is well to know that Cavalieri seems to have had a modest and noble nature, and that his personal attachment and artistic appreciation soothed the declining days of Michelangelo, at whose end he was present.

The mention of Michelangelo himself (Lettere, No. 466; Symonds, Life, vol. ii, p. 130) seems to prove that this sonnet was really composed for his young friend. But it is one thing to conclude that the piece was addressed to Cavalieri, quite another to suppose that it was inspired by him. The ideas are the same as those elsewhere appearing in reference to women. The composition does not appear to me one of the most original, and I should be disposed to regard it as ordinary love verse, into which, out of compliment, the writer had introduced the punning allusion. In any case, it is to be observed that in the Platonic compositions treating of male friendship, the whole argument is metaphorical, the comparisons being

borrowed from the earlier poetry of sexual love.

Fundamental is the question, What proportion of Michelangelo's verse was intended to relate to men, and how far can such verse, if existent, be taken to imply that he had no separate way of feeling for women? The opinions of Mr. Symonds have already been cited (see note to No. 6 [xx]). In noticing Michelangelo's use of the idiomatic Tuscan word *signore*, lord, as applied in the sonnets to female persons as well as male (the English *liege* may similarly be used), he says, "But that Michelangelo by the *signore* always or frequently meant a woman can be disproved in many ways. I will only adduce the fragment of one sonnet" (No. LXXXIII). It is a pity that Mr. Symonds did not enter into detail; I am quite at a loss for any circumstances that can be held to warrant his declaration. For the word, the sonnets only afford information. No. xvi, containing the words *signior mie car*, is a variant of No. xv, expressly addressed to a lady. In No. xxii, no one will doubt that the reference is to a woman. In No. xxxv the sex is shown by the epithet *leggiadre*, fair, applied to the arms (Mr. Symonds renders "fragile"). No. xxxvii qualifies *signor* by *donna*. No. lv treats of the shyness of a lady in presence of

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her lover. In No. XL, instead of *signior*, the variant gives *donna*. No. XLVII seems obviously addressed to Vittoria Colonna. In No. XXXVI, the feminine application appears to be indicated by the description of the sovereign person as reigning *nella casa d' amore*. Thus in not a single instance can the suggestion of Mr. Symonds be accepted.

There remains the fragment mentioned, No. LXXXIII, a beautiful and interesting piece, unhappily imperfect. "Yonder it was that Love (*amor*; variant, *signior*), his mercy, took my heart, rather my life; here with beauteous eyes he promised me aid, and with the same took it away. Yonder he bound me, here he loosed me; here for myself I wept, and with infinite grief saw issue from this stone him who took me from myself, and of me would none." It will be seen that the masculine pronoun is rendered necessary by the reference to personified Love, and that the allusion is clearly to sexual passion. Mr. Symonds has not entirely comprehended the scope of the fragment. The mystical description of Love as issuing from a stone (*sasso*) may probably be an application of the familiar sculpturesque metaphor.

As, in the instances considered, the opinion of Mr. Symonds appears void of foundation, so it is counter to the tenor of the poetry.

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If No. xxxi really was written for Cavalieri, the reference probably consisted of no more than the introduction, into the ordinary phrases of a love poem, of a complimentary play on words. As for the metaphor by which a lady is compared to an armed enemy, that was already commonplace in the day of Dante.

14 [xxxii] From pieces dealing with ideal affection we pass to one obviously biographic in its inspiration. The poem is written below a letter of 1532, addressed to the sculptor when in Rome. The artist seems to refer to his own impetuous nature, too liable to quarrel with friends. Analogous is the sonnet addressed to Luigi del Riccio. (See madrigal No. 3 [iv] note.) But this composition evidently relates to a lady, as is shown by the mention of the *dorato strale*, gilded dart of Love.

15 [xxxiii] As with all lyric poetry, so in the compositions of Michelangelo, it is not to be assumed that every expression of emotion of necessity corresponds to some particular experience. Yet the tenderness, melancholy, and gentle regret which inspire the verse evidently reflect the character and habitual manner of feeling of the author. Related in sentiment are the following sonnets: —

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[XXVI]

NON MEN GRAN GRAZIA, DONNA, CHE GRAN
DOGLIA

By *happiness as deep as agony*
Below the scaffold is the caitiff slain,
When lost to hope, and ice in every vein,
His pardon comes, his sudden liberty ;
So when, beyond thy wonted charity,
My heaven overcast with many a pain
Thy sovereign pity doth make clear again,
More deep than anguish, pierceth ecstasy.
Sweet news and cruel in so far agree,
As either in a moment may destroy
The heart by grief, or sunder it through joy ;
If thou desirest that I live for thee,
The rapture mete, for many a creature frail
Hath died of grace too free for its avail.

[XXXV]

SENTO D' UN FOCO UN FREDDO ASPETTO
ACCESO

I SEE *a face that in itself is cold,*
Yet lit with fire that burneth me afar ;
Two arms, that quiet and unmoving are,
Whereby all else is movèd and controlled ;
The vision of a beauty I behold,
Immortal, yet pursuing me to death ;

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*A power that free, my own envelopeth ;
 Another's balm, that may my hurt enfold.
 How can befall, that a fair countenance
 Hath power to cause effect so contrary,
 Creating what it doth now own? Perchance,
 The life that taketh my felicity,
 Yet doth itself deny, is like the sun,
 That yieldeth the world heat, yet heat hath none.*

[XXXVIII]

RENDETE A GLI OCCHI MIEI, O FONTE O FIUME

*AH give me back, or river thou or source,
 The turbid waters that enlarge thee so,
 That thy augmented current doth o'erflow,
 And hasten on an unaccustomed course ;
 O laden air, whose gathered mists allay
 And temper heaven's shining to these eyes,
 Return my weary heart her many sighs,
 And cloudless leave the countenance of day.
 Earth, render to my feet their steps again,
 Along the track they trod let grass grow green ;
 Restore, deaf Echo, my petitions vain ;
 And ye, alas ! unmovèd eyes serene !
 Give mine their wasted looks, that they may see
 Some kinder loveliness, disdained by thee !*

With these sonnets of ideal love may be compared one later in date, apparently more biographic in sentiment, and doubtless inspired by Vittoria Colonna.

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[L]

S' I' AVESSI CREDUTO AL PRIMO SGUARDO

HAD I *believed, when first I met the glow*
Of this bright soul, my sun, that I might rise
Through fire renewed in such triumphal wise
As doth the Phœnix from her ashes go,
Like some fleet-footed creature, pard or roe,
That seeks its joy and flieth from its fear,
To meet the act, the smile, the accent dear,
I would have leaped, now in my swiftness slow.
Yet why indulge regret, the while I see
In eyes of this glad angel, without cease,
My calm repose and everlasting peace?
More painful days, perchance, had dawned on
me,
If I had earlier met, yet been denied
The wings she lendeth me to fly beside.

16 [xxxix] The timid lover, who finds himself involved in the dangers of a hopeless passion, endeavors to withdraw from the perilous situation, but in so doing finds himself confronted by another danger, that of losing the affection which has become his life. As the vain desire will prove the death of the body, so the renunciation will be that of the soul; thus the suitor, according to the familiar metaphorical system furnished by plastic

art, is said to see his lady with a statue of Death on either hand.

The beautiful and mystic sonnet was written on a stray leaf bearing a memorandum of 1529, and was probably composed in that year. According to the statement of the nephew, Nos. 8 and 9 [xxiv and xxv] were also written on letters of that year; and these two poems correspond in sentiment with the present piece.

17 [xl] This most beautiful sonnet might conjecturally be referred to the same period as No. 12 [xxix]. The spirit of the verse ought to be enough to satisfy any reader that it was composed with reference to a woman. (See note to No. 13 [xxx].)

18, 19 [xlIII, xlIV] These two pieces, containing respectively the dispraise and praise of night, are obviously intended to be counterparts, the first forming an introduction to the second. The consolations belonging to darkness and slumber have furnished themes to very many writers of verse; but among all such pieces Michelangelo's tribute is entitled to preëminence. The emotion, deepening with the progress of the rhyme, ends in one of those outbursts which make the poetry a key to the character. Two other sonnets treating of the same subject do not appear to be connected.

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[XLI]

COLUI CHE FECE, E NON DI COSA ALCUNA

HE *who did erst from primal nothing bring*
Time, integral and property of none,
To half, dividing, gave the distant sun,
To half the moon, a lamp more neighboring.
All in a moment, Destiny and Chance
Began, and over mortals ruled with power ;
To me they gave the still and sober hour,
As like to like, in birth and circumstance.
As attribute in action is expressed,
And darkness is the property of night,
So e'en to be myself is sad to be ;
Yet is my troubled spirit soothed to rest,
Remembering, its dusk may render bright
The sun that Fortune lent for friend to thee.

In No. XLII Night is lauded, as the shadow in which man is engendered, while in the day the soil is broken only for the seed of the corn ; but the composition does not rival the sweetness and sublimity of No. XLIV.

20 [LII] This fine sonnet, belonging to the later period, may be set down as among those inspired by Vittoria Colonna. Thoroughly characteristic is the grand fifth line, in which the soul is said to have been created as God's equal. The nephew, of course, diluted such daring conceptions into common-

place, and his restoration altogether fails to convey the essential meaning of the piece. Wordsworth, unfortunately, knew only the emasculated version.

Similar in theme is another sonnet, No. LX, also rendered by Wordsworth, from a text more nearly representative. In this instance the English poet has transcended his source, and furnished a proof that on fortunate occasions a translation may belong to the very best poetry, and deserve that immortality which commonly belongs only to expressions of original genius.

*YES! hope may with my strong desire keep pace,
And I be undeluded, undismayed;
For if of our affections none find grace
In sight of heaven, then wherefore hath God
made*

*The world which we inhabit? Better plea
Love cannot have, than that in loving thee
Glory to that eternal peace is paid,
Which such divinity to thee imparts,
As hallows and makes pure all gentle hearts.
His hope is treacherous only, whose love dies
With beauty, which is varying every hour;
But in chaste hearts uninfluenced by the power
Of earthly change, there blooms a deathless
flower,
That breathes on earth the air of Paradise.*

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21 [LVI] The sonnet is to be classed with the preceding. In a variant, the theologic metaphor is carried further: "From without, I know not whence, came that immortal part which separateth not from thy sacred breast, yet traverseth the entire world, healeth every intellect, and honoreth heaven."

22 [LXI] As all tools used by man are formed by means of other tools, the archetypal tool must be that celestial instrument by which the world is fashioned. On earth, Vittoria Colonna had been the hammer (as we now say, the chisel) by which had been inspired the creative activity of the artist. By her death, this influence had been withdrawn to heaven, there to become united with the all-forming hammer of the eternal Maker; it is, therefore, only from on high that the artist can look for the completion of his own genius.

To the text, in the hand of Michelangelo, is added a sentence expressing his sense of the incomparable merit of Vittoria, as the divine instrument which none other is able to wield, and a prayer that his own hammer, as he metaphorically says, may also attain a reception in heaven.

The mystically expressed, but in reality simple and direct verse is crowded with ideas which strive for utterance. The sculptor

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seems to have written prophetically ; after the passing away of Vittoria, the last of his animating impulses appears to have been removed, and his life becomes that of a recluse, struggling with the infirmities of advancing age.

Several other pieces relate to the death of Vittoria.

[LXII]

QUAND' EL MINISTRO DE' SOSPIR ME' TANTI
 WHEN *she who ministereth sighs, withdrew*
From the world's sight, from her own self and
mine,
Nature, who made her in our eyes to shine,
Remained abashed, and downcast all who knew.
Yet be not Death of his loud vauntings rife
O'er the sun's sun, as over others ; Love
Hath him subdued, and her endowed with life
Both here below, and with the pure above.
Unjust and haughty Death did so engage
To hush her praises, and her soul bestow
Where it would seem less beautiful ; and lo !
Reverse effects illuminate Time's page ;
On earth, more life than she in life possessed,
While Heaven who wished her, now enjoyeth
blest.

The thought, that Nature is disgraced in the loss of its best creation, is repeated in Michelangelo's poetry. (See sonnet No. 4 [xvii], madrigal No. 9 [xiii].)

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Two other sonnets, Nos. LXIII and LXIV, breathe an atmosphere of the most gloomy despair. The first expresses a profound self-reproach; the time to soar heavenward was while the sun of life still shone; it is now too late. The second declares that the flame has expired, to leave only ashes without a spark.

I do not doubt that here also belongs another sonnet, placed by Guasti as if belonging to an earlier date.

[L I]

TORNAMI AL TEMPO ALLOR CHE LENTA E
SCIOLTA

*GIVE me the day when free was cast the rein
For headlong ardor's unreflecting race;
Restore to me the calm angelic face
Wherewith interred seems Virtue to remain;
Give back the wanderings, the steps of pain,
So slow to him by weary age oppressed;
Give water to my eyes, fire to my breast,
If thou wilt take thy fill of me again.
If, Love, 't is true, thou livest on no more
Than sighs and tears of lovers bitter-sweet,
A weary age hath nought of thy desire;
The soul already near the further shore,
With shield of holier darts doth thine defeat,
And the burned wood is proof against the fire.*

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A madrigal relates to the same theme.

[VI]

PER NON S' AVERE A RIPIGLIAR DA TANTI

THAT *perfectness of beauty free from peer*
 Might be reclaimed and garnered without fail,
 Upon a lady excellently clear
 Was it bestowed beneath a shining veil;
 The heavenly boon had hardly been repaid,
 If scattered among all that Heaven had made.
 Now, from world unaware,
 In breathing of a sigh,
 Hath God who reigns on high
 Resumed, and hid away his beauty fair.
 Yet, though the body die,
 Cherish shall memory still
 Sacred and sweet, her written legacy.
 Compassionate and stern, if Heaven's will
 To all had granted what to her alone,
 We all had died for making good the loan.

The madrigal recites that deity had chosen to embody in a single life the sum of beauty, to the end that the celestial gift might be more easily resumed. Similar *concetti* are to be found in the series of epitaphs composed on Cecchino Bracci, in 1544. Mr. Symonds very unjustly criticises the verse as constrained, affected, and exhibiting an absence of genuine grief.

NOTES ON THE
EPIGRAMS

I [I] THE NIGHT OF THE MEDICI CHAPEL. According to Vasari, when the statues of the Medici Chapel were exposed to view, after Michelangelo's departure for Rome, early in 1535, an unknown author affixed a quatrain to the image of Night. This person was afterwards known as Giovanni di Carlo Strozzi, at the time eighteen years of age. The verse, not ungraceful but superficial, recited that Night, carved by an angel, was living, for the very reason that she seemed to sleep, and if accosted, would make reply. To this fanciful compliment, Michelangelo responded in the beautiful quatrain, which exhibits his view of the Medicean usurpation.

It were to be wished that in presence of the awful forms, visitors would bear in mind the sculptor's advice. I have heard a young American lady, in a voice somewhat strident, expound to her mother the theme of the statue, reading aloud the information furnished by Baedeker.

2 [II] DEATH AND THE COFFIN. The younger Buonarroti cites the statement of Bernardo Buontalenti, that in his house in Rome, halfway up the stair, Michelangelo

had drawn a skeleton Death carrying on his shoulder a coffin, on which were inscribed these lines. The story is interesting, in connection with the part taken by Death in the verse of the sculptor. Gianotti represents him as declining to attend a merry-making on the ground that it was necessary to muse on Death. (See madrigal No. 12 [xvi].) The idea appears to be that death cannot be dreadful, since it bequeaths to life not only the immortal soul, but even the body; probably the artist meant to say the body made immortal through art.

3 [v] DEFINITION OF LOVE. With this definition from the subjective point of view, may be compared madrigal No. 5 [viii]. As usual the imagination of the poet takes plastic form; Love, in his mind, is a statue lying in the heart, and waiting to be unveiled. Akin is the celebrated sonnet of Dante, *Amor e cor gentil sono una cosa*, which contains the same conception, and which perhaps Michelangelo may have remembered. But the more mystical idea of the sculptor borrows only the suggestion.

NOTES ON THE
MADRIGALS

1 [I] During his Roman residence, Michelangelo was brought into intimate relations with Florentine exiles, who gathered in Rome, where ruled a Farnese pope, and where certain cardinals favored the anti-Medicean faction. From the course of a turbulent mountain-brook, Florence, following an inevitable law, was obliged to issue into the quiet but lifeless flow of inevitable despotism. It could not be expected that the fiery Michelangelo could comprehend the inexorableness of the fate which, in consequence of the necessities of trade, compelled Florence to prefer conditions ensuring tranquillity, though under an inglorious and corrupt personal rule. The sublime madrigal shows the depth of his republican sentiments. (See No. 22 [LXVIII].)

2 [III] The difficult but very interesting madrigal gives a profound insight into the spirit of the writer, who felt himself to move in a society foreign from the higher flight of his genius. His habits of isolation are remarked by contemporaries. Giannotti, in the dialogue above mentioned, discourses amusingly on this trait of character, putting

into the mouth of the artist a reply to an invitation. "I won't promise." "Why?" "Because I had rather stay at home." "For what reason?" "Because, if I should put myself under such conditions, I should be too gay; and I don't want to be gay." Luigi del Riccio, introduced as interlocutor, exclaims that he never heard of such a thing; in this sad world one must seize every opportunity of distraction; he himself would supply a monochord, and they would all dance, to drive away sorrow. To this comforting proposition, Michelangelo returns that he should much prefer to cry. Giannotti romances; but Francis of Holland is nearer the fact when he makes the sculptor answer an accusation urged against solitary habits. The artist declares that there is good ground for such accusation against one who withdraws from the world by reason of eccentricity, but not against a man who has something better to do with his time. The particular occasion of the madrigal seems to have been dissatisfaction with praise lavished on what to Michelangelo seemed an unworthy work. Southey paraphrases the poem, but gives the idea only imperfectly.

Here, in connection with the idea of beauty as furnished from within, may be introduced a version of a madrigal interesting rather on

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account of the philosophic conception than the poetic excellence. (See also sonnet XVIII, translated in the note to No. xxx.)

[VII]

PER FIDO ESEMPIO ALLA MIA VOCAZIONE

*ON me hath been bestowed by birthtide-gift,
Of both mine arts the mirror and the light,
Beauty, my model in my calling here.
It only hath the competence to lift
The vision of the artist to that height
At which I aim in form or color clear.*

*If judgment rash and fantasy unwise
Degrade to sense the beauty, that doth bear
And raise toward heaven all sane intelligence,
Man's wavering glances have no power to rise,
Above inconstant, faithful only where
They linger, unless mercy call them thence.*

3 [IV] The madrigal is addressed to Luigi del Riccio, friend of Michelangelo's declining years, and a correspondent to whom were transmitted many of the extant poems. In 1544 Luigi, during a sickness of the sculptor, took him into his own house and acted as his nurse; but shortly afterwards, he refused a request of the artist, declining to suppress an engraving he had been requested to destroy.

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The indignation of Michelangelo found vent in a bitter letter. Riccio died in 1546. Symonds (Life, vol. ii, p. 194) thinks that Michelangelo speedily excused his friend and repented his anger. Here the whole heart of the artist is disclosed, and we have a revelation of the manner in which internal brooding and many disappointments had rendered somewhat morose a gentle and affectionate nature, characterized by pride amounting to a fault.

With the idea may be compared Emerson's essay on "Gifts." "Hence the fitness of beautiful, not useful things, for gifts. This giving is usurpation, and therefore, when the beneficiary is ungrateful, as all beneficiaries hate all Timons, not at all considering the value of the gift, but looking back to the greater store it was taken from, I rather sympathize with the beneficiary than with the anger of my lord Timon. For the expectation of gratitude is mean, and is continually punished by the total insensibility of the obliged person. It is great happiness to get off without injury and heart-burning from one who has had the ill-luck to be served by you. It is a very onerous business, this of being served, and the debtor naturally wishes to give you a slap." He adds, entirely in the spirit of Michelangelo, "No services are of any value, but only likeness."

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4 [v] The poet addresses to his friend Vittoria Colonna a theologic inquiry, after the manner of the appeals of Dante to Beatrice. Apparently the letter included a blank leaf for an answer. The question is, "In heaven are contrite sinners less valued than self-satisfied saints?" The obvious reply must be that in the nature of things such saints are impossible. The inquiry, therefore, is not to be taken as serious, but as playful and ironical. I should be inclined to interpret the verse as asking, "Am I, an humble artist, but sincerely devoted, of less value in your eyes than the very courtly and important personages by whom you are surrounded?" (as Vittoria was in close intimacy with high ecclesiastical functionaries). The sentiment is gay and jesting, while full of pleading affection.

5 [viii] If of all the compositions of Michelangelo, one were asked to name the most representative, it would be natural to select this incomparably lovely madrigal. No lyric poet has brought into a few words more music, more truth, more illumination. The four lines cited at the end of the Introduction might well be taken as the motto for a gathering of the poems; and if the arrangement had not seemed inconsistent with the numbering of the pieces, I would gladly have placed

the madrigal at the end, as summing up the especial contribution of Michelangelo to letters.

6 [IX] A charming and light-hearted piece of music, obviously belonging to the earlier period of Michelangelo's poetic activity. The verse is written on blue paper, with the subscription, "Divine things are spoken of in an azure field" (in heaven). The suggestion is furnished by a conventional *conchetto* of the period; but the familiarity does not prevent the thought lending itself to genuinely poetical treatment. No. x is a pretty variant, in which the cruelty of the lady is compared to the hardness of the marble in which her image is wrought. The lines are subscribed "for sculptors" (*Da scultori*). The close connection with his art lends to even the most simple of these verses an unspeakable attraction.

7 [XI] In this magnificent song, worthy of the greatest of lyric poets, we are still occupied with the concepts of plastic art. The artist achieves the complete expression of his idea only through painful toil, and often lapse of years which leave him ready to depart from a world in which accomplishment is itself a sign of ripeness for death. With that universal animism, as we now say, by which all general truths of man's life are felt to be also applicable to the course of Nature, the poet

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is entitled to apply the idea to external being. And with what insight! If ever genius can be said to have forecast the conclusions of scientific inquiry, it is so in this instance; Michelangelo presents us with a truly modern conception of Nature, as the creative artist, who through a series of ages and a succession of sketches, is occupied with continually unsuccessful, but ever-improving efforts at the expression of her internal life. The perfection of the creature, which marks the accomplishment of the undertaking, signifies also the end of the process; with such completeness is felt the sorrow incident to all termination, and especially the pain of the mortal, who feels that delight in perfect beauty enforces the consciousness of his own transitoriness, and emphasizes the sense of Nature as perishable. Hence, perhaps it may be explained that all perception of perfect loveliness is said to be accompanied by a sensation of fear. The piece possesses a grandeur of rhythm corresponding to its depth of intellectual apprehension, and is worthy to stand beside the greatest of the artist's plastic productions, as equally immortal. In such verse Michelangelo rose to the level of a world poet; nor has early English literature anything of a kindred nature worthy to be placed in comparison.

8 [xii] Michelangelo perpetually varies

but never repeats the theme. Once more, it is not the trembling of the hand which causes the artist's failure; it is the uncertainty of the mind, not clear as to its intent.

9 [XIII] Again the bitter contrast of the permanence of art with the fleeting period of human life. We have had the idea in sonnet xvii. But the argument is now carried a step further. According to mediæval (and also modern) national morality, the destruction of kindred implies the duty of blood-vengeance. On whom, then, devolves the conduct of the feud made necessary by the taking away of the beloved? Not on man, but on Nature, whose pride must be offended by the preference given to the works of her children as compared with the transitoriness of her own. The permanence of the artistic product is therefore a sign that Nature herself is bound to require of Time atonement for the wrong done to imagination; and thus art is made the prophet of restoration.

10 [xiv] The metaphor is now furnished by the work of the metal-caster; and since in this case there has been no change in the conditions of manufacture, the comparison still seems simple and natural.

11 [xv] The tender, simple, and universally applicable lament at the same time includes its own consolation.

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12 [XVI] The idea of Death as deliverer from Love is often repeated by the poet. Giannotti probably followed rather the verse than any spoken words in the sentences he has put into the lips of the artist: "I remind you that to re-discover one's self, and to enjoy one's self, it is not necessary to seize on so many pleasures and delights, but only to reflect on death. This is the only thought which enables us to recognize ourselves, which maintains us in unity with ourselves, and prevents us from being robbed by parents, kinsfolk, friends, great masters, ambition, avarice, and other vices and sins, which take man from man, and keep him dispersed and dissipated, without suffering him ever to find himself and become at one with himself. Marvellous is the effect of this thought of death, which in virtue of its nature all-destructive, nevertheless conserves and supports those who include it in their meditation, and defends them from every human passion. Which, methinks, I have sufficiently indicated in a madrigal, where, in treating of love, I conclude that against it is no better defence than the thought of death."

A beautiful variation, characterized by the author's invariable originality, is furnished by the number next in Guasti's edition.

NOTES

[XVII]

NELLA MEMORIA DELLE COSE BELLE

WHEN *Memory may cherish and endear
Some lovely sight, resolve availeth not
For her discrowning, until Death appear,
And exile her, as she made him forgot,
Chill flame to frost, change laughter into pain,
And make abhorred the beauty loved before,
That tenanteth the empty heart no more.
Yet if she turn again
Her lucid eyes toward home of their desire,
With arid bough more ardent grows the fire.*

13 [XVIII] The idea that only through contemplating the person of the beloved can the soul transcend from time to eternity is familiar in the later compositions of Michelangelo. Compare sonnet 21 [LVI].

14 [XIX] The same conception receives a different treatment; mortal beauty is now represented as exercising too potent an attraction, and preventing the desire from mounting beyond it.

15 [XXI] The thought has been elaborated in a modern sense by Lowell in his "Endymion:" —

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GODDESS, *reclimb thy heaven, and be once more
An inaccessible splendor to adore,
A faith, a hope of such transcendent worth
As bred ennobling discontent with earth;
Give back the longing, back the elated mood
That, fed with thee, spurned every meaner good;
Give even the spur of impotent despair
That, without hope, still bade aspire and dare;
Give back the need to worship that still pours
Down to the soul that virtue it adores!*

So far the idea coincides with that of Michelangelo; but the conclusion of the later poet varies:—

*Goddess triform, I own thy triple spell,
My heaven's queen,—queen, too, of my earth and
hell!*

Such could not be the termination of the author of the Renaissance, at a time when his star was Vittoria Colonna.

16 [XXIII] The sweet and plaintive verse was popular as a song even in the lifetime of Michelangelo, as may be inferred from its mention by Varchi.

17 [XXV] The madrigal has all the spirit of English song in the early part of the seventeenth century; but what English verse, having the same idea, could be mentioned in comparison?

18 [LII] The beautiful song exhibits a great number of variations. Perhaps on account of the musical character, counteracting a meditative tendency, Platonic philosophy appears only as lending a gentle mist transformed by the sunshine of pleasurable passion.

19 [LIII] Compare No. LXXII. I should assign this madrigal, in spite of its light character, to the later epoch.

20 [LIV] The ninth line appears to contain a reference to Vittoria Colonna, who lived in a convent, toward which the desires of the poet, as he says, scarce dared to reach.

21 [LVII] It can scarce be doubted that the attribution of masculine thought to the beloved is a reference to the character of Vittoria.

22 [LXVIII] The dialogue of this madrigal is intentionally veiled, as if the poet were conscious of dealing with a dangerous theme. Sublime are the last two lines, containing all the Michelangelo of the Sistine frescoes; the sentiment is not the purely Christian conception of forgiveness of injuries, the mildness which on principle turns the other cheek. Significant is the word *altero*, haughty; Michelangelo describes the sentiment of a great and proud spirit, so lofty as to feel a superiority to personal resentment, so truly Flo-

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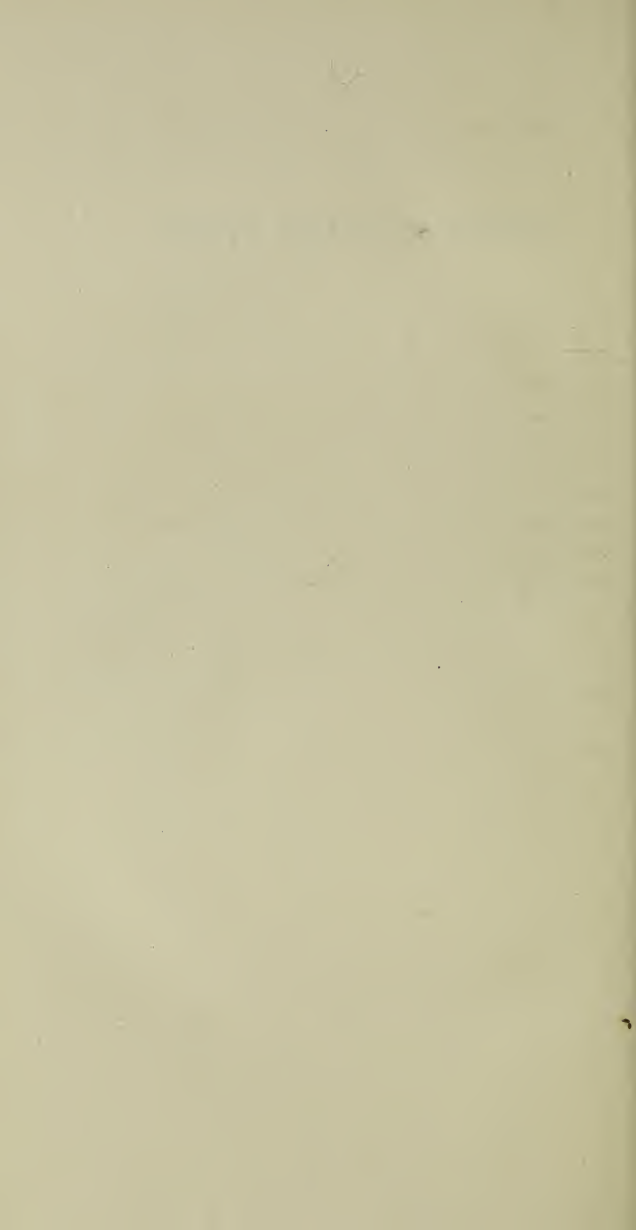
rentine as to receive no satisfaction in the prospect of vengeance taken on a citizen of Florence.

23 [LXIX] A pretty piece of poetic ratiocination, cast into the form of a case tried before a court of love, and ending, in the spirit of the poet, with a universal truth.

24 [LXXII] Compare No. 20 [LIV]. It will be seen that the allusions give some reason to believe that the idea is intended to be biographic, though of course not to be taken as entirely literal.

25 [XCIII] A pleasing way of expressing a sense of the incompatibility of Love and Death, that appears in many variations, and must be considered biographic in its sentiment.

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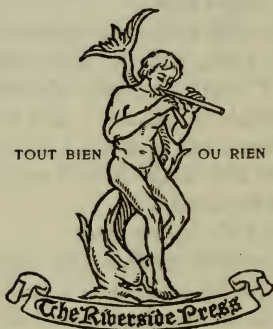
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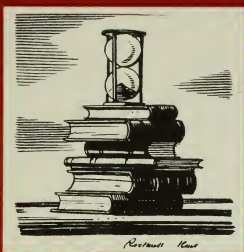


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